

THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF MADELEINE LUCETTE RYLEY.

No. 2.

MICE AND MEN,

A ROMANTIC COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS,

BY

Madeleine Lucette Ryley.

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

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MICE AND MEN.

A Romantic Comedy in Four Acts.

BY

MADELEINE LUCETTE RYLEY.

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1918**

MICE AND MEN.

Produced at the Lyric Theatre, January 27th, 1902.

CHARACTERS:

Mark Embury (<i>A scholar, scientist, and philosopher</i>) ...	MR. FORBES ROBERTSON
Roger Goodlake (<i>His friend and neighbour</i>) ...	MR. LUIGI LABLACHE
Captain George Lovell (<i>His nephew</i>) ...	MR. BEN WEBSTER
Sir Harry Trimblestone ...	MR. LEON QUARTERMAINE
Kit Barniger (<i>A fiddler and a professor of deportment</i>) ...	MR. J. H. RYLEY
Peter (<i>Embury's servant</i>) ...	MR. WILLIAM FARREN, JUN.
Joanna Goodlake (<i>Wife of Goodlake</i>) ...	MISS ALICE DE WINTON
Mrs. Deborah (<i>Embury's house-keeper</i>) ...	MISS CARLINGFORD
Peggy (<i>"Little Britain"</i>) ...	MISS GERTRUDE ELLIOTT
Matron (<i>Of the Foundling Hospital</i>) ...	MISS MINNIE GRIFFIN
Beadle (<i>Of the Foundling Hospital</i>) ...	MR. ERNEST COSHAM
Molly (<i>A kitchen maid</i>) ...	MISS EDITH FENCHESTER

PLACE: Old Hampstead.

PERIOD: About 1786.

PREFACE.

(*From the SATURDAY REVIEW, February 15th, 1902.*)

I am grateful to Mrs. Madeleine Lucette Ryley for having written "Mice and Men," and to Mr. Forbes Robertson for having produced it. It is a play which I have long awaited—so long awaited that I had begun to fear it would never be vouchsafed. For years I have been sneering at every sentimental play that has been produced, and thus (I fear) alienating the majority of you, my readers. Doubtless, you have come to regard me as a creature with a heart of stone, as a ruthless brute, quite impervious to any soft appeal, quite incapable of delight in the presentment of aught but what is grim and terrible. And I, all the while, have known my heart to be really an up-welling spring of the most limpid sentiment, undiscovered only because no Dramatist had come by with a divining rod. All the while I have been beset with an ardent, unsatisfied desire for the bread and butter, the buttercups and daisies, of drama—for fresh butter, nicely spread on new bread nicely cut, for field flowers really a-growing and a-blowing. At length Mrs. Ryley has given me the things I wanted, and with them the chance of disproving myself a monster. You who have misjudged me, behold me dancing with all the grace of true joy among the real buttercups and daisies, and swallowing the good bread and butter like a hungry, healthy child.

The middle-age doctrinaire who was once crossed in love, but who has at length decided that it is his duty to marry and beget an heir—what playgoer does not know him? What playgoer does not know that he will, in a cold and calculating way, select from the lower class some healthy and very young girl who, after she has been educated for a certain number of years according to an ideal system, will be in a position to marry him and in due course supply him with a paragon worthy to carry on the traditions of his family? Who does not know that he will, after the due lapse of years, realise that he loves his intended bride madly, devotedly? Who does not know that, when at length he makes his proposal to her, he will make it so delicately that

PREFACE.

she will imagine that he is asking her to marry his scapegrace nephew—the young and joyous soldier, who is her idea, even as she is his? And who does not foresee the end—the middle-aged doctrinaire, cloaked and hatted, faltering slowly down the garden path, opening the wicket, and turning, ere he utterly effaces himself, an almost happy smile towards the house—the house that was to have been his and hers—from which are wafted the strains of “My love is like a red, red rose,” sung as a duet by the two young people? This is a story that must have been exploited in a score of sentimental books and sentimental plays. In real life, of course it would be impossible. But these objections to “Mice and Men” are made by me merely in cold blood: I had no glimmer of them during the play’s procedure. I surrendered whole-heartedly, taking the play for all it was worth, smiling and sighing and brushing away tears with the best of them. The reason why I was able to enjoy the sentiment and sentimentality of this play is simply that Mrs. Ryley has a genuine talent for sentimental comedy. Sense of humour has not been denied to Mrs. Ryley. It prevents her from ever becoming maudlin. Her sentiment is always airy and wholesome. Moreover, she can write. What a relief, after that illiterate slush to which we have so long been accustomed to find dialogue that is really like human speech, yet terser and more distinguished than human speech!

Even by mere reason of its literary style, “Mice and Men” is delightful, and rare among plays.

But the chief ingredient of its delightful rarity is that it is a fairy story conceived in a sincere spirit—a fairy story in which I can believe.

"MICE AND MEN."

ACT I.

April.

SCENE.—MARK EMBURY'S study; a low raftered, ungainly room; a casement window at back C. open, with vines trained round the outside; at R. 1st E. a door with a brass disc and a small catch to indicate a spring lock; the furniture is plain to severity; two or three straight-backed wooden chairs, writing-table up R.C.; rough cabinet at L.; small wooden bench at L.; rough shelves with scientific books; a draughtsman's table upper L. with carpenter's tools; some stuffed animals and birds on shelves; maps and charcoal drawings on walls; globular charts, etc., on writing table; an oblong kitchen-table with drawer at R. end down near C.; table has on it implements for chemical experiments, etc.; also a small spirit lamp, burning; table is placed at a slight angle in the direction of the door; the floor is bare.

At rise of curtain PETER is tidying the room with the aid of a mop; presently there is a knocking at the door; PETER looks up, but continues to sweep towards the bench; the knock is repeated impatiently; PETER leans the mop against bench, crosses slowly to R., releases the catch and opens door; MRS. DEBORAH, a portly dame, appears on the threshold; she wears cap and a black apron.

MRS. D. (*impatiently*) Peter, I vow you are worse than a scullery wench when it comes to wasting my precious time. I want that mop. (*she takes a step forward*)

PETER. (*waving her back*) Bide there, and I'll bring it to you. (*fetches it.*) This be sacred ground up here, and house-keepers is forbidden to trespass. (*bows ironically*)

MRS. D. (*snatching the mop*) Drat your impudence. One'd suppose I was a kitchen wench instead of being a reduced gentlewoman with a line of forbears.

PETER. That's the point. You be a gentlewoman, not a gentleman, and Mr. Embury cannot abide a petticoat. (*lowers his voice.*) It's been said that a burnt child dreads the fire, Mrs. Deborah, and I've heard it put about that some years ago a lady of fashion—

MRS. D. Tut, man, it's beneath a woman of my family to listen to idle gossip. (*quickly*) Would she be light or dark,

think you? (*PETER shakes his head and turns to c.*) I warrant she was one of your gay fly-by-nights. Philosophers always take to that kind, just to balance their wisdom, and keep them fools same as the rest of mankind.

PETER. Not so loud, Mrs. D.; the master's gone but to the garden gate with his nephew, Captain Lovell. (*he spies a small object on the floor; he picks it up, goes to the window and examines it*)

MRS. D. (*following him by R. of table R.*) What is it you've found, Peter? It looks like a woman's miniature. (*edges nearer to get a glimpse of it; he places it behind his back*) Who could have dropped it, think you?

PETER. Nay, Mrs. Deborah, if I were to tell you what I think, why, then you'd be as wise as I. (*looks out*) Quick! Mr. Embury's coming back with Captain Lovell. No, 'tain't the Captain who's with him now, but Mr. Goodlake. (*hustles her to door*)

MRS. D. (*going out*) I'll not break my neck, not I, for all the men in Christendom. (*exit*)

PETER looks at the locket, hesitates; then, hearing voices outside, puts it in his pocket.

EMBURY (*outside*) Careful, neighbour, the steps are shallow.

Enter MARK EMBURY, followed by ROGER GOODLAKE; EMBURY is plainly dressed, almost to asceticism; his hair, which is somewhat long, is without powder and tied with a ribbon; he is about forty-two years old, and has a grave but kindly manner; GOODLAKE is about fifty-five; he is fashionably clothed in a juvenile manner; he wears powder, etc., and carries himself in a vigorous and sprightly fashion; he speaks emphatically and in a loud voice; EMBURY crosses behind table to chair L. of table.

GOOD. (*panting for breath*) A devilish staircase, Embury, and better than the family Bible for discovering a man's real age. (*looks round the room*) Strike me if it isn't the old hay-loft, you've turned into a study! What's the meaning on't?

EMBURY. 'Tis merely a device to ensure a stricter privacy. My work has suffered much from interruption of late.

PETER brings a tobacco jar from cabinet upper L., then pipes; he places them beside GOODLAKE, who proceeds to fill pipe; PETER retires up R. to table; GOODLAKE sits on chair R. of table R.

Good. Gad ! I remember. Joanna has told me something concerning the arrival of a housekeeper. (*laughs*) Mark Embury, the hermit, with a female flunkey in his retinue. Oh Lord, we'll make a man of fashion out of you yet. But what has set the ball a rolling ?

EMBURY. All in good time, Roger. (*turns and goes up c.*) Get you below, Peter. You may leave the door open. The draught will scatter the fumes of Friend Goodlake's ungodly weed. (*exit PETER R. carrying off pail and duster*)

Good. (*laying pipe aside*) I'm not much in the humour for it to-day. In truth I'm vexed—sorely—damnable vexed ! About a lost miniature. A portrait of Joanna. The handsomest woman in Europe, though she is my wife. I could have taken oath I left it in my cabinet when I set out on my journey six weeks ago. (*EMBURY sits in chair L. of table c.*)

EMBURY. I trust you find your lady in flourishing health.

Good. (*enthusiastically*) Fresh as a newly opened rose, and uncommon pleased at my return. I wager 'tis not every truant spouse who receives so hearty a welcome.

EMBURY. 'Tis not every one who deserves it.

Good True, though I'll take no credit. When a man possesses a pink—a pearl—a paragon—(*pauses irresolutely*) I could sometimes wish Joanna were a little less vivacious, though it is not unnatural in one of her years. (*lights pipe again*)

EMBURY. Do not lay on Nature the faults of Society, friend Roger. If women are in general feeble in body and in mind, it is the fault of our modern education ; we encourage a vicious indolence, which we call delicacy. We teach them useless arts. We breed them to insincerity, and then we wonder at their fickleness and duplicity. (*rises and goes up c.*)

Good. Ah, I'd forgotten, I was putting a spur to your hobbyhorse. You are for training the youngsters like savages in a hut.

EMBURY. (*coming down c. again*) I'd have them instructed in simplicity, and Nature is the only dame who teaches it.

Good. (*shaking his head*) I had a relative who put the scheme into practice, with but poor result.

EMBURY. He started too late, maybe.

Good. Ye Gods ! The child was but three weeks old.

EMBURY. Much too late. He should have begun with the mother. To make great men, one must first perfect a woman. (*going up c.*)

Good. (*boisterously*) Gad ! Of all your mighty theories, 'tis the best yet.

EMBURY. (*at back of table B.*) Suppose I told you it was my design to put it to the proof?

GOOD. (*laying down his pipe in astonishment*) Mr. Embury, I should say you had gone mad—stark, staring mad.

EMBURY. (*laying a hand on GOODLAKE'S shoulder*) Nay, dear friend, I am sound enough, and being sound it is my duty to perpetuate my race. If I can perform that duty scientifically, I satisfy a rational curiosity, the result of which may be a permanent benefit to mankind.

GOOD. So you'd marry for an experiment, eh?

EMBURY. All men marry for an experiment, friend, though they haven't all my altruistic excuse.

GOOD. Whate'er the excuse, 'tis a venture that's hedged with disappointment.

EMBURY. Because passion is allowed to replace judgment.

GOOD. True, but damme if I can see where you are better equipped for the game than the rest of us.

EMBURY. (*smiling*) One who has already passed through the measles will, it is popularly believed, be thereafter impervious to the disease. *My* love days are passed, old friend; ergo, (*smiles*) I am ripe for marriage.

GOOD. (*laughing*) And the required attributes of the future Mrs. Embury?

EMBURY. She must have a taste for the sciences; be chaste, but not prudish; simple as a mountain maid; fearless as the Spartan wives—in short, with all the virtues of her sex, and none of its weaknesses.

GOOD. Lord above us! And where are you going to find the creature?

EMBURY. It is a discovery that I have long despaired of, and so, as I have intimated, it is my intention to begin with the raw material. But the thing's as good as done. (*takes a letter from the table at back*) Through my attorney I've made application to the directors of the Foundling Hospital. Here is their reply. (*hands letter to GOODLAKE, and sits on chair L. of table*)

GOOD. (*reading*) "Dear Sir,—The high moral probity of your philanthropic client is too widely known to admit of a doubt as to his honourably discharging his avowed intentions. On his agreeing to the conditions herein imposed we will send, in charge of our Matron and the Beadle, several girls, from among whom he may choose a ward." (*laying paper on the table*) What are the conditions?

EMBURY. (*reading from another sheet*) "Should the said Mark Embury renounce his intention of marrying his ward when of suitable age, he must bequeath to her an adequate allowance. Secondly, a nurse, governess, or female custodian

of respectable antecedents must be engaged to reside in the house, to preserve the social amenities.

GOOD. That then explains the Housekeeper.

EMBURY. (*nodding*) A lady of a prodigious pedigree. (*resumes reading*) "Thirdly, the girl must be apprenticed to a married man, residing in the vicinity, who will give bonds for the fulfilment of conditions one and two."

GOOD. And where in all Hampstead are you going to find this accomplice to your cracked-brained scheme?

EMBURY. (*rising*) He is already found.

GOOD. H'm—I warrant he's not respectable.

EMBURY. (*going behind table R.*) His name is the synonym for all the virtues.

GOOD. The devil it is!

EMBURY. His language is apt to trip when he is heated, but he is a most worthy gentleman and they call him Roger Goodlake. (*patting him on shoulder.*)

GOOD. (*rising with a burst of passion*) But damme! I won't do it.

EMBURY. (*L. of table, smiling*) You've done it. Your name has been accepted, and it is your proud privilege to assist in the selection of my—of our—ward. (*looks at his watch and comes down L.*) The samples will be arriving shortly.

GOOD. By Gad, Mr. Embury, this is a pretty advantage to take of a man in his absence. It's—it's—monstrous! (*his passion gradually subsides into a chuckle*) Monstrous absurd. (*sits*) Oh Lord! Training up a child on Philosophic pap, or every Gentleman his own Wife-raiser. (*laughs*) I trust you'll deck her in becoming loin clothes. Ha-ha-ha!

EMBURY. Nay, do not scoff, Roger, for never was a man more earnest, or more hopeful than I.

GOOD. But it's your stupendous audacity, thinking to remould a bit of human nature, and female human nature at that.

EMBURY. As the twig is bent the tree is formed.

GOOD. Bending the twig will never make a willow of a poplar. Is it your plan to inform the girl as to your ultimate intention?

EMBURY. No. That had best remain a secret for the present. (*goes down L.C. to seat L.*)

GOOD. Then I'll not tell Joanna. (*rising and crossing to C.*) Lord! That reminds me I'm intrusted with a commission. It concerns your nephew, Captain Lovell. Joanna, whose maternal instinct is surprising in one of her years, has, it seems, had her sympathies aroused on behalf of your scape-grace.

EMBURY goes to bookcase for book, then sits at L.

EMBURY. How comes Mrs. Goodlake to be acquainted with my nephew's supposed injuries?

GOOD. She has it from her cousin, Sir Harry Trimblestone, that Lovell is being plaguily ill-used by you, in consequence of some scrape the youngster has fallen into, and her tender heart is for pleading him a pardon.

EMBURY. (*coldly*) I regret having to deny aught to a lady—and your wife, but Captain Lovell received my ultimatum in this room, scarce half an hour ago.

GOOD. By your look there is more behind the fence. What's he been after? (*smiles*) Is it a woman, think you?

EMBURY (*rising gravely*). I fancy there is generally a woman, friend Roger.

GOOD. (*chuckling*) Lord, you're right. But how 'twould shock Joanna. I wonder who is the baggage?

PETER *appearing at door*.

PETER. Mistress Goodlake (*GOODLAKE turns to PETER*) desires to know whether she may venture to intrude.

EMBURY. Beg her to come up.

PETER *withdraws*. EMBURY *paces up and down*. He is down L. as JOANNA enters.

GOOD. (*proudly*) Mark you, Embury, she cannot bear me out of her sight for ten minutes. (*quickly*) Perhaps she has found the miniature. (*goes excitedly through door and speaks outside*) Be careful, my love. 'Tis a devil of staircase for beauty's feet to climb. Take my hand—so. (*he leads JOANNA in; she is about twenty-eight, fashionably dressed, and with an air of supreme vanity. GOODLAKE kisses her hand.*)

JOANNA. (*in front of door, pettishly*) There, there, Mr. Goodlake. You all but stepped on my gown. (*curtseys to EMBURY*) So polite of you to allow me to come up. (*looks round*) And what a sweet, romantic place. (*EMBURY bows coldly. JOANNA goes C.*)

GOOD. (*R. impatiently*) You've brought news of the miniature, Joanna?

JOANNA. (*petulantly*) The miniature! Will you never have done harping on that miniature. It has probably been cast on the hearth with the carpet shaking. What think you, Mr. Embury? Is it not poor taste in him to regret so much the portrait when he still has the original?

EMBURY. 'Tis not uncommon in man, madam, to prize an object out of all proportion to its worth. (*down L.*) Will you be seated?

JOANNA. (*sneeringly*) You are vastly polite, sir. (*sits R. of table*) It seems as if Mr. Goodlake had been gone an age, so desolate have I been in his absence.

GOOD. (*at her R. teasingly*) What of the trips to Ranelagh, that Harry let on to?

JOANNA. Fie, Mr. Goodlake. Your credulity is amazing. I protest I scarce left the house.

GOOD. By the way, I have mentioned to Mr. Embury your concern for his black sheep of a nephew. (*EMBURY sits at L.*)

JOANNA. (*shocked*) My concern! Mr. Goodlake, you do not word it very circumspectly. If I seek to intercede, Lord knows 'tis in a motherly sense. (*sighs*) You'll not be too severe on him, Mr. Embury. 'Tis all the fault of his creditors. (*quickly, in answer to EMBURY's questioning look*) At least, so Harry tells me.

EMBURY. I think you implied just now that your cousin's word was not reliable.

JOANNA. Not where we poor women are concerned perhaps. But Captain Lovell is quite another matter. Since he has incurred your displeasure, it most wrings my heart to see—(*EMBURY turns quickly*) I mean—to hear of his dejection.

EMBURY. He has an opportunity to change into an Irish regiment, and so wean himself from the allurements of his present surroundings.

JOANNA. (*with concern*) But 'twould be a pity for him to desert so bracing a climate as Hampstead. Moreover the Dublin society is quite notorious for its immorality. Surely you will not cast so impetuous a youth—for so does Harry describe him—in the way of temptation.

GOOD. Hark to her, Embury. (*laughs*) I swear she'd mother all the young rascals from here to the dockyard. Come, what do you say? (*crosses to c.*)

EMBURY. (*significantly, rising*) I promise Mrs. Goodlake to place my nephew as far from temptation as it be possible.

MRS. DEBORAH *appears in the doorway.*

MRS. D. The foundlings are arrived, sir.

EMBURY. Conduct them here.

MRS. D. *retires*; EMBURY *places book in case and comes down L.*; *foundlings heard tramping off R.*

GOOD. (*going to JOANNA and raising her up*) Here is balm for your maternal soul, Joanna. Neighbour Embury is taking a girl from the Foundling to train and educate.

JOANNA. (*with indifference*) A girl! I have no monstrous liking for gir's. (*goes up c. by L. of table R.*)

GOODLAKE goes to EMBURY'S R. Enter MRS. DEBORAH;
she goes up to JOANNA C.

BEADLE. (*heard off*) Now then, get into line.

Girls heard marking time. Enter MATRON of the Hospital followed by the BEADLE, a pompous little man, and a string of the girls, ranging from eleven to sixteen years of age.

BEADLE. Ready to stop—Stop!

The girls halt; they are of various complexions and are all dressed in the Foundling uniform; some have closely cropped heads; the tallest have their hair tightly plaited excepting LITTLE BRITAIN, who comes last but one; her hair is in curls tied back; the MATRON arranges the girls in an oblique line, then turns each girl to face, finishing up with number ten, occasionally prodding one with her umbrella; this over, the BEADLE waves the MATRON aside and steps into the foreground; LITTLE BRITAIN, who is stationed last but one R., continually twitches her shoulders.

BEADLE. Now, then (*to girls*) Now when I say three, show your manners, co-incidentally. One—two—(*one girl makes an abrupt curtsy*) Look at that. There be a pretty piece for a object of charity. (*MATRON shakes her umbrella at the offender*) Once more. One—two—three! (*they all bob together, except last at right end, who is rubbing her eyes with the corner of her apron. The BEADLE thumps his stick on the ground. LITTLE BRITAIN nudges her neighbour, who furtively slaps her in return, then bobs*) Well, what are you so subsequential for?

10TH G. Please, I've got something in my eye.

BEADLE. Then you've no business to have things in your eye. This ain't a half holiday. (*LITTLE BRITAIN jerks her shoulders*) Number nine, stop wriggling. (*MATRON shakes her umbrella warningly. BEADLE turns*) Which gentleman is the guardian presumptive? (*EMBURY bows*) Then, sir, the inquisitorial may proceed. (*goes down R.*) For their healths and constitutions there's Mrs. Witchet. (*the MATRON curtseys*) For minds and morals, here is me.

EMBURY. (*steps to C. then turns. To GOODLAKE*) Go you forward, Roger, and question the maids.

GOOD. Nay, go you. It is your funeral, not mine.

EMBURY. (*nervously*) I—I—fear I scarce know how to put them at their ease.

GOOD. 'Tis easy done. (*winks*) Watch me. (*goes to tenth girl at R. and chucks her under the chin*) Damme, but you're a prodigious fine wench.

JOANNA. (*peremptorily*) Mr. Goodlake!

GOOD. Coming, Joanna, my love. (*he goes up to window.*)

EMBURY. (*timidly going to 1st GIRL*) What is your name, child?

GIRL. (*with a bob*) Bevis Marks.

EMBURY. (*nervously*) Ah, yes, yes. (*moves to number two*) And yours?

2ND G. (*bobbing*) Stepney Green. (*He passes along the row in some dismay. As his eye catches each GIRL she bobs a curtsy, and calls out her name.*)

3RD G. Clare Market.

4TH G. Highbury Barn.

5TH G. Charing Cross.

6TH G. Ivy Lane.

7TH G. Great Turnstile.

8TH G. Leicester Fields.

9TH G. Little Britain.

10TH G. Amen Corner.

EMBURY. (*Down R. in astonishment*) Heavens! And who gave you those names?

ALL G. (*Together, suddenly, in a mechanical chan'*) My Godfathers and Godmothers in my baptism, wherein I was made—

BEADLE exclaims violently "Ush! 'Ush! 'Ush!" and pounds with his stick to invoke silence. They cease.

GOODLAKE comes down by L. of BEADLE.

BEADLE. (*to EMBURY*) 'Tis our Hospital's custom to call them after the localizations they come from.

GOOD. (L.) Hang me, if it isn't monstrous ingenious. Come, Embury, choose your district. (*lowers his voice.*) Number Five suggests an equable climate.

MATRON. A trifle weak in the chest, sir. Whereas Leicester Fields is—(*points to 8th GIRL.*)

BEADLE. (*waving MATRON aside and crossing to L.C.*) A healthy tartar. Take my advice, sir, don't have a red-headed one. Now if you want an uncommon fine waif you can't do better than Stepney Green. (*moves over to table R. and points to No. 2.*)

GOOD. I swear her countenance would assure you undisturbed possession, neighbour.

EMBURY. The maid next the end there appears straight and sound of limb. (*points to LITTLE BRITAIN*)

MATRON. (*shaking her head*) Aye, she 's sound enough.

EMBURY. 'Tis an engaging face, suggesting many possibilities.

BEADLE. A mask for her deviltries. (*LITTLE BRITAIN turns her profile*)

EMBURY. Her hair is longer than the others.

MATRON. She'll ne'er stand still to have it cropped.

EMBURY. Bid her come hither. (*BEADLE advances to c.*)

BEADLE. Little Britain! Ready to step forward— Step! (*he goes down R.; she comes to c. twitching her shoulder.*)

EMBURY. How old are you, Little Britain? (*she mutely glances at BEADLE*)

BEADLE. Sixteen, sir.

EMBURY. You are tall for your age. Do you think you would like to live here, and be my ward? (*she looks at the BEADLE*)

BEADLE. I warrant she'd like it well enough.

EMBURY. (*to LITTLE BRITAIN*) Why don't you reply for yourself.

PEGGY. (*glancing at BEADLE*) He likes doing it. (*she twitches her shoulder.*)

GOOD. She seems troubled with St. Vitus' dance. 'Tis a malady not uncommon in the young.

EMBURY. Tell us, have you long been afflicted with these twitchings? (*she shakes her head*) Do you know aught of the cause?

PEGGY. Yes. There's a pin sticking in my back.

EMBURY *turns to GOODLAKE who laughs boisterously;*

MATRON *places her umbrella against table, goes to LITTLE B. and removes pin.*

EMBURY. She appears to be a straightforward and simple girl, so if she be willing, we may regard the matter as settled. (*crosses to R. C. GOODLAKE follows; BEADLE R. produces a document which he hands to EMBURY, who glances over it with GOODLAKE*)

MATRON. (*to LITTLE BRITAIN*) Hark ye, child, to your vast good fortune. (*LITTLE BRITAIN puts her apron to her eyes*) There, there, you've naught to fret at. Faith, I begin to like you better now I'm to be troubled with you no more. (*draws her aside*) I've got somewhere a bright new sixpence. (*feels in her pocket*) Ah, here 'tis. (*gives it*) Remember always to be humble to your betters and comb your hair straight at the parting. Now give me a kiss. (*embraces her*) And promise never to forget that you had the honour to be brought up a foundling. (*she turns to the girls whom she arranges in line ready for departure with faces turned towards the L.*)

EMBURY. Go you, Roger, with the Beadle and seal the contract. (*GOODLAKE and BEADLE go to the door*)

MATRON. Mr. Nole, we're waiting for the word.

BEADLE. (*turning*) Ready to march. March! (*exeunt BEADLE and GOODLAKE.*)

The MATRON marshals the girls round by L. of table; they bob a curtsy to EMBURY as they pass; LITTLE BRITAIN follows them to door and embraces each one who goes out, except the girl who has slapped her; she returns the slap, then suddenly repenting she embraces her. Exeunt girls and MATRON; LITTLE B. follows to door R.

EMBURY. (*when the girls are all off*) Come here, Little Britain. (*she approaches and he gazes at her seriously*) I've a mind to call you Peggy. May I? (*she nods*) 'Tis a name I much admire. Think you as Guardian and ward we shall suit?

PEGGY. (*curtseying*) Yes, sir, I think you'll—you'll do.

EMBURY. (*smiling*) I promise to earn your esteem if effort can secure it. (*turns to C.*)

PEGGY. (*impulsively seizing his hand*) And you won't cut off my hair?

EMBURY. Nay, I think not. (*withdraws his hand*) You are nervous, Peggy. We must practise repose. (*leads her to bench*) A few passages of Homer repeated in a measured—but I fancy you are not acquainted with Homer.

PEGGY. Homer! Is it anything like the multiplication table?

EMBURY. (*smiling*) They are not altogether dissimilar in their conclusions. So you know the tables?

PEGGY. Up to five times twelve.

EMBURY. Then repeat them slowly till I return. Mrs. Deborah. (*Mrs. D. comes down a step*) This is my ward. I commend her to your good care, Mrs. Goodlake. (*goes to door*) I'll not be long, Peggy. (*exit; Mrs. D. comes down with JOANNA from behind table*)

Mrs. D. (*looking at LITTLE B. from R. of table*) A sad sight, ma'am.

JOANNA. (*down C. staring at her*) It puts one in the vapours to look at the hapless creature.

Mrs. D. She has a sweet face.

JOANNA. That'll be no passport to her keeper's favour. I warrant he'll make her do penance for every dimple. The Ogre! (*LITTLE B. begins to cry*)

Mrs. D. See, ma'am, you've affrighted her. (*going to her*) There, my dear, no need to cry till you're hurt, and come

what may, Mrs. Deborah will be your friend, so give her a kiss. (*kisses her*)

JOANNA. (*coming down and thrusting Mrs. D. aside*) Mercy, but my commiseration for one is like to make me forget there is another who stands in even greater need of consolation. (*sighs and produces little looking-glass and powder-box from her pocket*) I pray you, girl, hold this, that I may take a glimpse at my rueful countenance. (*LITTLE B. takes glass and gazes admiringly at JOANNA as she settles her skirts and powders her face*) I declare I'm a fright. (*sighs*) Such are the ravages of grief—especially a grief we can't discourse on. Lower, girl, lower that I may see my waist. 'Tis proclaimed by one who knows the smallest in the world. (*LITTLE B. lowers the glass, still gazing at JOANNA*) The child is lost in admiration of my gown. (*puts the glass, etc., in her pocket*) I warrant 'tis a brief acquaintance she'll have with silk and satin. (*laughs*) Sackcloth gives better service, and the wearer's attention is not distracted from the sciences. (*laughs*) Good-bye, child. I look to you, Mrs. Deborah, to loosen the bars sometimes and let the prisoner visit me, for her relaxation. (*exit through door;—outside*) Mercy! These stairs.

During this scene MRS. D. takes letters from table R. to table upper R., then goes to table down R. and arranges it; she then follows JOANNA off and pulls the door after her; it closes with snap; PEGGY, as she is now to be called, looks round the room and realising her loneliness begins to cry; she checks herself presently as she remembers her task.

PEGGY. (*mechanically*) Twice one are two—twice two are four—twice three are six—(*her attention wanders to the appointments of the room, and she looks round with some curiosity; presently she tries the door and finding it will not open, sinks on the floor and covers her face with her apron*)

A head is seen outside the casement window and CAPTAIN GEORGE LOVELL, clinging to a vine, peeps in, then he raises himself to the sill, throws his leg over and cautiously enters; he is a handsome fellow of about 23 or 25, clad in regimentals; not perceiving PEGGY he begins hunting about the floor; while he is half under the table, PEGGY utters another faint cry for help; he puts his head out and stares.

LOVELL. Hillo, there! (*PEGGY removes her apron and stares in return*) Hillo, Missy, who the devil are you?

PEGGY. (*rising and bobbing a curtsey*) I am Mr. Embury's ward. I've just been adopted.

LOVELL. (*rising and laughing*) Just been adopted. No wonder you cried for help.

PEGGY. It was because the door wouldn't open.

LOVELL. Scared by a spring lock, eh? 'Tis an excellent device. (*nods*) Though I'm puzzled to divine how a man with no creditors came to think on't. Reassure yourself, Missy. Uncle Admirable means you no harm. He is gentleness personified to all save one. (*bows*) Yours to command is most uncommon deep in his black books just now.

PEGGY. (*looking at window*) Did you come through there, sir?

LOVELL. Yes. (*laughs*) What are you looking for—my wings? We latter-day spirits have no need of pinions to fly from a dun's persistence, or to our own undoing. (*looks about the floor*) I suppose you haven't seen anything hereabouts of a locket with a portrait on the front.

PEGGY. (*shaking her head and kneeling on the floor*) Let me look. You'll spoil your beautiful clothes.

LOVELL. (*laughing*) 'Pon my soul, you're a diverting little piece. So you admire my trappings, eh?

PEGGY. (*gravely*) They are very handsome, and so are you.

LOVELL. (*half drawing his sword*) Madam, 'tis clear you have a discerning eye. Permit me to salute you. (*salutes with hand*)

PEGGY. (*approaches him*) Could you open that door?

LOVELL. I warrant I could, though I scarce perceive the immediate necessity, unless you are still afraid.

PEGGY. I am not afraid now—while you are here.

LOVELL. Then you'd best invite me to remain. Come, ask me to sit. (*she looks up timidly, then suddenly bursts out with her forgotten task*)

PEGGY. Twice one are two—twice two are four—twice—

LOVELL. Whoa! Halt! What new game is this?

PEGGY. It is my task, sir.

LOVELL. A fig for your task. (*crosses to R., then turns to her and slowly backs her towards bench L.*) And by the way, my name is not sir, but George—George Lovell. What is yours, pretty one?

PEGGY. Little Britain, but Mr. Embury is to call me Peggy.

LOVELL. Then sit down, Peggy, and let us talk. (*she sits on bench L., and he sits on chair R.C.; he smiles; she smiles*) So you're not afraid of me?

PEGGY. Not a bit—George.

LOVELL. Yet I've been told I'm a dangerous fellow, and within the hour too.

PEGGY. Do you always enter at the window when you visit Mr. Embury?

LOVELL. (*laughing*) Nay, I mostly prefer the door, but I came in to seek for something that has escaped my pocket. The friend who gave it me will be much concerned if I do not bear it on my journey.

PEGGY. You are bound on a journey?

LOVELL. (*nodding*) My pulse has been a little feverish of late, and I am ordered a change of climate. (*springing up impatiently*) Gad! But I don't take kindly to the medicine.

PEGGY. Then what causes you to go?

LOVELL. Causes? The first—the foremost of all causes, Peggy. I've been running with a petticoat.

PEGGY. With a long petticoat? (*he nods; she looks at her own ankle skirts*) It is hard to run with a long petticoat.

LOVELL. It is harder not to, sweetheart. (*going towards her*) If you promise not to tell, I'll describe her to you. Blue eyes with dark lashes, and arched brows. Bewitching hands and feet, and the daintiest waist ever imprisoned by brocade.

PEGGY. Is her name Joanna?

LOVELL. What! You've seen her? (*she nods; he goes down. R.C.*) She's been here to beard the lion as she promised. With little result, I'll be bound.

PEGGY. Is she sorry you have to go away?

LOVELL. Sorry! (*comes back to C.*) I promise you she'll weep her eyes out.

PEGGY. And the old gentleman, will he weep his eyes out too?

LOVELL. (*coughs*) I'd scarce guarantee that. Old gentlemen have but little sympathy with "the object of their wives" sisterly regard.

PEGGY. You are her brother then?

LOVELL. (*nodding*) By adoption. But I'd ask you not to make gossip of the fact. Since you are to live here you'll see much of sweet Joanna. Sweet sister Joanna. (*goes up to window and PEGGY crosses to R.C.*) Her house lies yonder. (*points and kisses his hand towards it.*)

PEGGY. (R.C.) It must be beautiful to have a brother.

LOVELL. (*coming down L.*) It is, coz, it is.

PEGGY. I wish I had a brother.

LOVELL. H'm—you may have some day.

PEGGY. Is Mr. Embury any—anybody's brother?

LOVELL. (*shaking his head*) He'd like to have been once, but she jilted him.

PEGGY. (*trying to pronounce the word*) Jilted?

LOVELL. Yes, *jilted*—him. Since then he has forsworn the world and womankind.

PEGGY. (*anxiously*) Will you come back when the fever is cured—George?

LOVELL. Perhaps.

PEGGY. How long will it take?

LOVELL. (*down L.*) My sentence calls for two years, confound his heartlessness.

PEGGY. (*crossing close to him*) Couldn't you get cured without going away?

LOVELL. (*looking at her amusedly*) Maybe I could pretty one. (*he motions her to sit; she sits R. end of bench; he sits L. end.*) But poor people cannot do as they will.

PEGGY. Are you poor?

LOVELL. Fairly out at elbows, except we reckon by debts.

PEGGY. You should pay your debts.

LOVELL. With what, sweet Peggy? I swear you are a condiment for the most jaded appetite.

PEGGY. You mean you have no money.

LOVELL. The oracle has spoken.

PEGGY. I will lend you some. (*rises and goes to C. and produces her sixpence; he rises*) 'Twas the Matron's parting gift, but I've never had so large a piece, and should not know how to spend it. Why do you not take it?

LOVELL. I scarce think it would go far enough to satisfy all my creditors and 'tis unwise to create a jealousy. (*she looks disappointed and sits in chair R. of table*) I thank you for the offer pretty coz. (*goes to table and sits on it*) I've a notion that given the opportunity we'd have been good friends. You remind me of a song I sometimes chant to the harpsichord. It runs thus, Peggy. (*sings in a low voice*)

O my love is like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June;
My love is like a melody,
That's sweetly played in tune.
As fair art thou, my bonny lass,
So deep in love am I,
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

(*pause*) I wonder if you'd send me a letter sometimes with news of Hampstead—and—and—the neighbours? Rutland Barracks, Dublin, will find me. (*steps down to C.*)

PEGGY. (*sadly rising*) I cannot write.

LOVELL. Ah, that's a pity. A great pity. (*there is a noise on the stair; PEGGY goes to door R.*) 'Sh! I must be gone.

Uncle Admirable would not favour this mode of entrance to his study. (*she motions him to open the door ; he goes to it*) Wait, I'll first raise the catch. It goes stiffly, and one must employ a knack. (*he quietly moves the catch on the door, then runs to the window, climbs out, and putting his finger to his lips, disappears ; she sits demurely on the bench and commences her tables ; a step is heard outside*)

Enter EMBURY. PEGGY rises.

EMBURY. Ah, Peggy. 'Twas not intentionally that Mrs. Deborah closed the door. How did you manage to loosen the catch? (*she goes to L.C.*) 'Tis somewhat hard. (*pause*) How did you accomplish it?

PEGGY. I employed a knack. (*she curtsseys*)

EMBURY. Do not curtsey thus, child. The manners of society have no place in our curriculum. (*PETER appears at the door*) What is it, Peter?

PETER. (*coming forward*) I've been waiting till you should be alone, master. (*produces miniature*) I found this on the floor here.

EMBURY. (*taking it*) Here—when?

PETER. Just after you and Captain Lovell went out.

EMBURY. (*frowning*) Ah. By-the-by, I want a word with Captain Lovell. You'll likely find him over at the Barracks. (*exit PETER*) (*EMBURY places the trinket on the table R., then turns and gazes at PEGGY*) You have not felt lonely in my absence? (*she shakes her head*) Good! You lack not the art of self-communion. How is your courage? (*sits on chair R. of table*)

PEGGY. Very well, thank you, sir.

EMBURY. Good again. (*takes pistol from drawer*) Do you perceive this? (*she nods*) 'Tis not loaded. Now count, one, two, three. (*she counts: at three he points pistol at her feet and pulls the trigger; she gives a scream and a jump*) Ah, not so good. No matter, we'll do better by and by. Be a good girl, Peggy, and I will show you how to draw a circle and an equilateral triangle.

PEGGY. (*quietly*) That will be nice.

EMBURY. If there's aught that excites your curiosity, I beg you'll satisfy yourself by judicious questions.

PEGGY. What is jilted? (*a pause*)

EMBURY. Jilted?

PEGGY. Yes, jilted. What does it mean? (*rubbing her hands nervously*)

EMBURY. (*uneasily*) Jilted means deceived, but 'tis scarce a word we'll need in our daily practice. (*suddenly crossing to her*) I hope your circulation's good. 'Twould

please me, Peggy, to know you had an inclination to run barefoot on the heath in the early morning. Such habits harden the body, and make us impervious to disease. (*he walks up with his hands behind him, then suddenly turns to table up R.*) Do you know how to shoe a horse? (*she shakes her head*) Ah, I will show you to-morrow. (*PETER appears at door*)

PETER. Captain Lovell, master.

EMBURY. Bid him come up. (*exit PETER ; EMBURY takes the miniature from the table R., hesitates a moment, then places it prominently on the floor C. ; PEGGY looks wonderingly on and sits on bench L. ; enter LOVELL*) Peggy. (*she rises*) This is my nephew, Captain Lovell. (*she curtsies*) My ward. (*LOVELL winks at her, then gravely bows ; she tries to guide his eyes to the miniature ; he perceives it and is about to stoop when EMBURY turns again*)

LOVELL. You sent for me, sir. (*keeps his eye nervously on miniature*)

EMBURY. (*walking carelessly over the spot*) Yes. I had a doubt. 'Twas but a small one, still, I desired to satisfy it.

LOVELL. (*R. anxiously*) My friends have weakened your decisions?

EMBURY. (*Sits R. of table*) Nay, though they seemed vastly anxious to defeat your expedition.

LOVELL. My friends, sir, would naturally be solicitous for my good name. To run away from one's creditors is to mislead them in regard to one's ultimate intentions.

EMBURY. You may depart with a light conscience, for 'tis my design to pay these creditors.

LOVELL. Your generosity shall never be forgotten, uncle. But these harpies paid, the necessity for my departure is removed.

EMBURY. Nay, there are other—more serious dangers. (*rises and turns to table at back for writing materials which he places on table R. ; LOVELL quickly picks up the miniature and put it in his pocket ; EMBURY sighs*) My resolution is unchanged, I'd have you ponder well what you do with the next two years. If at the end you have put your follies behind you, your reformation shall receive substantial recognition. If, on the contrary—

LOVELL. (*sharply*) We need not take the contrary into account, sir.

EMBURY. I am relieved to hear it. (*commences writing*)

LOVELL. (*going towards door*) Is there aught else, uncle? (*PEGGY rises and goes to L.C.*)

EMBURY. (*without turning*) Yes. That little ornament you just now picked up. You may take it across to neighbour

Goodlake, with my compliments, and say that either he, or his lady must have dropped it during his recent visit. (*he advances toward LOVELL*) Can I trust you with this commission?

LOVELL. (*hesitates, then impulsively extends his hand*) You can, sir. (*EMBURY takes his hand, he then bows and after a surreptitious kiss of his hand to PEGGY exits quickly; PEGGY gazes wistfully at the door as LOVELL's steps are heard descending*)

EMBURY. (*with a sigh of relief*) That much off our minds, Peggy. And now to lay our plans for your education. (*enthusiastically*) We're going to substitute science for embroidery—the anvil for the harpsichord—the birds shall school us in song and the ants in architecture.

PEGGY. (*with a lingering look towards the door*) And will you—will you—teach me how to write?

EMBURY. (*going to R. of table*) Aye, you shall do all that becomes a maid. Trained in sweet simplicity, unable to deceive.

PEGGY. Deceive—that's jilted, isn't it? I'll try not to jilt you very often. But please let us—let us to the writing.

EMBURY. (*choosing a pen*) The writing! (*PEGGY sits on chair L. of table*) Aye, we'll to the writing. (*hands her the pen*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

MARCH. *Nearly two years later; the living room in MR. EMBURY'S house; a latched door in a small porch opens on to the garden at back; at L. of door there is a diamond framed window; door at upper R. and another at lower R.; between these doors a ponderous chest of drawers or press, surmounted by curtained shelves; a chair in front of press; a fireplace at L. (no fire); near fireplace a large square table and chair, and at back between door and window a small writing table, with quills, ink, writing paper, etc.; a small chair at writing table; at rise of curtain*

MRS. DEBORAH *in stiff gown and black silk apron is sitting at large table at needlework; enter MOLLY, a raw-looking maid-servant, from lower R.*

MOLLY. The pastry things be all ready in the scullery Mrs. Deborah.

MRS. D. *(glancing at clock)* Mercy on us! Nigh on twelve o'clock. *(rises and folds her work; figure passes the window and a knock is heard at the door)* See who's at the door, Molly. *(goes to press and places workbasket on it)*

MOLLY opens door and **KIT BARNIGER** enters; he is a quaint little, deferential, old-fashioned man, between 40 and 50; he carries a green baize bag, and a paper bag; his attitudes are suggestive of a minuet; Mrs. D. turns)

MRS. D. By all that's welcome, 'tis Kit Barniger, blown down from London, just as I am dying for news of the fashions. *(KIT lays his hat, green bag, and paper bag on the table, then gravely kisses MRS. D.'s extended hand; she sees the green bag)* I declare you've brought your fiddle.

KIT. *(L.C. near table, with an apologetic cough)* An' please you, Mrs. Deborah, 'twould be more correct to say the fiddle had brought me. There's to be a grand Masquerade at Belsize to-night, and I've been hired to lead the——

MRS. D. *(R.C.)* 'Sh! *(turns to MOLLY, who has been unconsciously imitating KIT's movements)* Don't stand so, Gaby, but fetch the pastry board. *(exit MOLLY; she turns to KIT)* I'd not for worlds it should get about that I had a relative who capered for a living, so give me the fiddle. *(he hands her the green bag, and she places it in press and takes out a white apron, which she puts on)* Mr. Embury is all against the assemblies,

and his neighbour, Mr. Goodlake, is up in arms about them. (*returns to c.*) But you've not told me what is the latest style in petticoats. I hear that waists grow short again, and hoods are become prodigious.

KIT. (*undoing paper bag*) They needs be to cover the heads, ma'am. (*takes out an enormous hair pad*) I've brought you the newest thing among the quality.

MRS. D. (*taking it*) Lord! A cushion for the hair. (*examines it*) 'Tis elegant, and not even Mrs. Goodlake has aught so genteel. (*goes behind KIT and L. of table*) 'Twill open some eyes at church, I'm thinking. (*lays pad on table as MOLLY enters with flour barrel, board, and materials for the pastry, and then exits*) Sit you down, Kit. I'd die of shame should Mr. Embury come in, and catch you with your toes outpointed so.

KIT. (*meekly obeying*) I fancy I observed Mr. Embury working in the garden.

MRS. D. Aye, he's trying to grow foreign plants according to a theory.

KIT. And his ward, Miss Peggy.

MRS. D. (*making the pie*) Thrives vastly well, bless her, when one considers her savage training. She has not a single polite accomplishment. She knows not even how to swoon, and though nigh on eighteen, will as soon run bare-foot as shod. (*lowers her voice*) But, mark you—(*touches him with rolling pin across the table; he disconcertedly moves further away*) There's a changing of the tables. (*laughs*) 'Tis the master who's getting to be the pupil now, and he's no more notion of it than had Adam when he bit the apple and brought us all down to—

KIT. (*looking at pad*) Hair pads, Mrs. Deborah.

(*EMBURY and GOODLAKE pass the window*)

MRS. D. Hist—somebody's coming. Place it in the paper, and see that you turn your toes in.

KIT conceals the pad as EMBURY and GOODLAKE enter through door at back; EMBURY is much less austere in his manner, and looks younger than in the 1st Act; he is in his shirt sleeves with his coat over his arm, and carries a flower pot)

Good. (*angrily*) Damme, but I'll have these masquerades stopped, if I have to carry the matter into Parliament. They're drawing all the scum from town. Why, only yesterday Joanna was ogled in the street by some city dandy. (*sees KIT*) Ah, who's this? (*KIT has risen and is standing in a characteristic attitude*)

MRS. D. (*L. curtsying stiffly*) An' please you, Mr. Good-lake, it is my cousin twice removed.

EMBURY. (R.) To be sure, and no better credentials could he bring, except he were but once removed.

MRS. D. Thank you kindly, sir. (*gives paste board to KIT, and nudges him to change his attitude*) Bear this to the scullery, Kit, it is time to think of dinner. (*she takes the other things, leaving only the flour barrel, and follows KIT to lower R.*)

EMBURY. By the way, Mrs. Deborah (*she turns*) do you set an extra plate. Captain Lovell has returned to England, and will dine with us. (*Mrs. D. curtsyes and goes off, after nudging KIT, who is posing at door R. ; he follows her*)

GOOD. So, the exile is recalled, and what have two years done for your scapegrace, Embury?

EMBURY. Much, if report speaks truly. He has lately taken an interest in our horticulture, and has sent Peggy some shamrocks from Ireland. (*thoughtfully*) This I take to be a promising sign.

GOOD. H'm—uncommon promising. And the maid?

EMBURY. (*innocently*) Is likewise deeply interested in the science. She has even sent specimens in return. (*rubs his hands*) Ah, I'm progressing, Roger, I'm progressing.

GOOD. Ah, you're progressing fast enough. 'Tis a toss up whether you'll be a finished gardener or a finished fool. (*sits near table*)

EMBURY. I'll own the cactus plants have scarce fulfilled my calculations. (*places flower pot on window sill*)

GOOD. Ye gods! Who ever heard of growing cacti in a cabbage earth. Try yellow turnips. 'Tis the best soil in all England for yellow turnips. To prove it, I'll send you a basket of my own raising.

EMBURY. (*putting his coat on*) Bah! The soil, my friend, is what the scientific gardener chooses to make it.

GOOD. H'm—'twas thus you reasoned when you adopted the young wench.

EMBURY. (R.) And was I not justified? Tell me, old Killjoy, where else will you find a maid who sets no store by ornamental dress? Who has never seen her own reflection, save perhaps in a meadow pool? Who—who is——

GOOD. (*sarcastically*) "Fearless as the Spartan wives."

EMBURY. (*uneasily*) I'll own I cannot make her wholly contemptuous of danger.

GOOD. (*quoting*) "With a taste for the sciences."

EMBURY. And does she not love botany?

GOOD. Ah, I'd forgotten the botany. Well, I warned you at the time that dissatisfaction would come of it, and so 'twill.

EMBURY. On what rests your argument, Roger?

GOOD. On this. She's a woman, and thus predestined to mischief. The one safeguard is matrimony, and so you'd do well to make her acquainted with your project.

EMBURY. (*nervously*) She's young yet.

GOOD. That's a fault she'll overcome without your help. Dod's man? Now's the time for you to act.

EMBURY. And what if I've begun already. (GOODLAKE *looks up*; EMBURY *laughs*) Your curiosity makes me half a mind to keep you guessing. Nay, I'll tell you. I've bought the old South Cottage, on the other side of the hill. 'Tis filled with my workmen, who are planning the interior anew, and with special reference to the needs of a young mistress.

GOOD. (*sarcastically*) And did you begin with the chimney pots and work downwards? For thus would the same man do, who'd build the cage before he'd snared the bird.

EMBURY, (*going towards R.*) Too much precipitance will sometime lose a man the prize. (*coughs*) How think you one had best approach—

GOOD. A woman? (*rises*) As one would pluck a nettle. No gingerly touch, as you'd save your skin, but with a firm grasp and resolute will. 'Twas thus I won Joanna. (*chuckles*) And 'tis thus I keep her sole regard. 'Tis I who command, and she who obeys. Which reminds me, she has ordered me to meet the coach. Her cousin, Sir Harry Trimblestone, comes on a visit. (*goes up*) I'll tell my man to bring over the basket of yellow turnips. And hark you, see to it that you pluck the nettle ere another saves you the trouble. Lord? I know women as I know my own head in the glass. (*exit*; EMBURY *walks to and fro buried in thought*).

EMBURY. A woman? It seems scarce possible she can be a woman. (*goes down L.*)

The back door opens and PEGGY bursts in; she is barefooted, and swings her laced shoes over her arm; under her arm she carries two ponderous books; one has a green cover; she is clad in a simple grey or brown frock, ankle length; the sleeves are short and there is white cambric at the neck; she wears a bunch of purple hyacinths in her bodice; her hair is in long curls; she is humming the song sung by LOVELL in first act (she pauses on seeing EMBURY, and remains shyly up stage)

EMBURY. Good morning, Peggy.

PEGGY. Good morning, guardian (*moves down R.*)

EMBURY. (L.C.) Do not run away yet.

PEGGY. (*coming down*) You seemed so deep in thought.
(*places books on ledge of press*)

EMBURY. I was thinking—thinking that perhaps 'twas scarce maidenly to run about so. (*glancing at her feet*)

PEGGY. (*trying to hide her feet by standing on one foot at a time*) "Such habits harden the body and render us impervious to disease."

EMBURY. (*uneasily*) Yes, yes. But now that you are—er—

PEGGY. Quite hardened?

EMBURY. Now that you are older. (*halts before her*) You are older, Peggy. Older than you were. Indeed, I've a notion you must be almost a woman.

PEGGY. Who has told you?

EMBURY. Told me?

PEGGY. Yes. You are so much engaged, you could ne'er have had the time to find it out for yourself. You are not displeased, I hope. 'Tis a thing one cannot avoid.

EMBURY. No, I am not displeased.

PEGGY. (*smiling*) That is well. You see I wanted to be grown up, and was waiting for you to give your sanction. (*pauses*) I suppose I'd best put on my shoes. (*she motions as if to sit on the floor*; EMBURY then takes chair from table and places it in c. then turns away; PEGGY turns the chair so that it has its back to him and audience, and begins to put on her stockings and shoes; she resumes the refrain she was singing when she entered)

EMBURY. (*down L. listening*) What is that you are always singing?

PEGGY. (*timidly*) 'Tis something I heard a long time ago.

EMBURY. Won't you sing it for me, with the words?

PEGGY. I will try, if I may sing it while my back is turned.

EMBURY. Yes, yes. (*she sings shyly in a low voice verse of song sung by LOVELL in Act 1st. It ends with the lines: "And I will love thee still my dear, till a' the seas gang dry"; she rises at finish. EMBURY has crossed to R. during second half of verse*; PEGGY on finishing the refrain replaces the chair by table).

EMBURY. (*R. repeating and glancing at her dreamily*) "Till a' the seas gang dry." (*he turns away and takes up her books from the press*) It seems you prosecute your studies out of doors. 'Tis a plan to be commended. (*reads title of book*) "Hume's Inferential Psychology." (*reads another*) "Galileo's Astronomical Calculations." Faith, 'twere hard to find two better companions for a country ramble. (*goes R.C.*)

PEGGY. (*with earnestness, taking book*) Indeed it is so. Of all the books in your library, there is none will lay a sprig so flat, or press a fern so well. (*opens and shows pressed leaves between the pages, then takes up the green book*) Since Mr.

Galileo wears a green coat, I let him mind the shamrocks that came from Ireland. (*shows shamrocks. He frowns*) See. But I've angered you. How? Is it my hair? I cannot remedy it. The more I try to comb it straight, the more it curls. (*takes hold of a ringlet*) See for yourself. Pull it. 'Twill not hurt. (*he timidly takes the ringlet in his hand*)

EMBURY. 'Tis very soft and springy. You need not try to straighten it, Peggy, for I fancy I'd not have it other than it is. (*he moves away, then turns*) Still, I am like to be disappointed in you. (*she murmurs deprecatingly and her face falls*) There, not so much perhaps, but a little.

PEGGY. For my lack of learning, is it? Is that so grave a fault in—in—a girl? Two learned people in a house, had like to make it rather dull, I'm thinking. And then, if I were other than I am, I could not be myself, (*replaces books on shelf and comes to him*), and that might cause you disappointment also.

EMBURY. (*softly*) In truth, I think it might. (*turns away*)

PEGGY. Then you'll not be vexed with me any more? For I love you best of all I know.

EMBURY. (*turning nervously to her*) You—you love me, said you?

PEGGY. (*looking him straight in the eyes*) Faith, I do. Who in all the world is so good?

EMBURY. Ah, and so you love me for my goodness?

PEGGY. Yes. (*laughs*) And if you'll but love me for my badness, we shall both merit the other's approbation.

EMBURY. For what do you love those wild hyacinths that you gather every day? (*points*)

PEGGY. For their beautiful colour. (*takes some from her bodice*) Please take some. They'll remind you of your promise not to scold me any more.

EMBURY. And when they fade, what then?

PEGGY. I'll bring you others. But I've set you frowning again.

EMBURY. (*taking her hand*) Nay, child, I was thinking, I—I—have something to tell you, something that—

Enter PETER.

PETER. A paper-hanger would speak with you, master.

EMBURY. Show him to the study. I will come. (*exit PETER; EMBURY moves up c*)

PEGGY. But the secret—you'll not go without—telling me the secret. I warrant 'tis something pleasing.

EMBURY. I hope 'twill please you. I almost think it will, (*nervously*) But I've scarce time now.

PEGGY. (*disappointed*) Is it that you are afraid to trust me now that I'm grown up. If you really did love me —

EMBURY. (*murmuring half to himself*)

“I will love thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.”

(*smiles*) Yes, yes, you are a woman. Quite a woman. (*exit*)

PEGGY. (*disconsolately goes down L. then sits on table*) It would seem that I must have aged a deal since breakfast. (*she looks round cautiously, then darts to the chest of drawers, and takes a small looking-glass; while she is surveying herself enter MRS. DEBORAH, lower R.*)

MRS. D. (R.C.) Mercy! Did one ever see the like of it? I vow there's no hiding things from young monkeys. Put it down, Miss, or as I live, your guardian shall hear—

PEGGY. (L.C.) Shall hear that despite his orders, you keep in the house a looking-glass. (*laughs*)

MRS. D. A gentlewoman must needs keep her cap straight.

PEGGY. (*teasingly*) Then so you'll behave well in future, I'll not tell him. (*dances her round*) Mrs Deborah, I'm grown up, grown up. What think you of that?

MRS. D. (*wrenching herself free, L.C.*) Think, madcap? I think you'd best show some proof of it. There, put back the glass, like my pretty one. (*goes to table. PEGGY takes glass to the press, and while replacing it, she discovers the green bag*)

PEGGY. Oh, ho! What is this? A fiddle! (*takes it out of bag*)

MRS. D. (*turning*) Lord! You'll be the death o' me. Put it down ere Kit catches sight of you.

PEGGY. What! Kit here? Dear, captivating Kit.

MRS. D. 'Sh! He is come to conduct the dancing at the Masquerade Ball to-night.

PEGGY. A ball! Happy, hateful, abominable Kit. (*she capers about*)

(*Knock at door; MRS. D. motions her to hide the fiddle, and goes to the door; PEGGY places fiddle in press. Enter JOANNA GOODLAKE*)

JOANNA, Good morning, Mrs. Deborah. (*she kisses PEGGY on the forehead*) I declare our captive bird looks quite merry. (*MRS. D. comes down L.C.*)

PEGGY. (*excitedly*) Have you heard there's to be a ball to-night?

JOANNA. (C., *sighing*) Alas, yes, child. And I know of more than one gallant who'd take me, did I not fear to make another jealous.

Mrs. D. By Kit's account all Hampstead will be there. I'll warrant Captain Lovell has timed his arrival for it.

JOANNA AND PEGGY (*together*) Captain Lovell!

Mrs. D. Aye, he's to dine here to-day, and Lord! I've not turned the pastry. (*bustles off lower R. crossing in front of them*)

PEGGY. (R.C., *excitedly*) Mr. Embury hinted he had pleasing news for me. It must have been this, that George was come home.

JOANNA. (L.C., *sharply*) George! You are uncommon familiar with his name. I warn you he'd not like it. He does not favour intimacy, save with one.

PEGGY. (*inquisitively*) Save with one?

JOANNA. (*casting down her eyes*) Since you will have it, his heart has long been in another's keeping. The notes I've given you from time to time to enclose with your fern leaves have all borne messages from her.

PEGGY. Her?

JOANNA. His lady love. Er—a close friend of mine.

PEGGY. Is she handsome?

JOANNA. (*coquettishly*) That's scarce for me to say, though I warrant he thinks so.

PEGGY. 'Tis strange he should have sent her no replies.

JOANNA. Nay, to pretend to have forgotten her is to satisfy his relatives.

PEGGY. Will she be at the ball, think you?

JOANNA. 'Tis possible (*turns to PEGGY*) Do you know I've a mind to go myself and you shall go too, Peggy. So you but keep my intentions a secret. My cousin, Sir Harry, would be charmed to escort you. He's had glimpses of you in the meadows hereabouts. Indeed I've had much ado to keep him from making his admiration known, and so mortifying old Rigorous.

PEGGY. (*sharply*) If you mean my guardian, I pray you call him so.

JOANNA. Hoity toity! I had thought you were a girl of spirit, who would like to see an Assembly for once in her life.

PEGGY. (*enthusiastically*) I should love it.

JOANNA. (*sneeringly*) Still one must not vex one's "dear Guardian."

PEGGY. I'd not vex him for the world. (*naively*) And so I would not let him know.

JOANNA. Then I may tell Sir Harry?

PEGGY. Nay, I'll not go with Sir Harry. Wait, ah! Kit, dear old Kit shall take me. (*darts towards B, then halts*) But I had forgotten. My frock. (*looks at it*) Alas, I cannot go.

JOANNA. Silly child. Do you think I'd make the offer and not provide the means. What say you to my second best Buttercup Satin? For myself I've a brand new gown, which Mr. Goodlake has not laid eyes upon. He'd rail at my extravagance. You shall have a mask also, and some ornaments. I'll despatch them in a basket. (*goes up, then stops*) I was forgetting. I've a message for Captain Lovell. I'd best write it down, so you can deliver it. (*she goes to table at back L.C. where there are writing materials. She sits, takes a pen and writes*)

PEGGY. (*quietly*) Is it from his—his—lady love?

JOANNA. (*slyly looking back over her shoulder*) May be it is. (*writes*)

PEGGY. (*going to JOANNA'S R.*) What is her name?

JOANNA. (*smiling*) Nay, I never tell names. Nor do I use them when I write.

PEGGY. I scarce think I'd like to be a letter carrier.

JOANNA. Nonsense. 'Tis naught but a few polite words. Fetch me some wafers, child. (*imperatively*) Fetch me some wafers. (PEGGY *goes off upper R.* JOANNA *rises and reads her letter* "She whose heart throbs at news of your return bids you be at Belsize Masquerade to-night.") (PEGGY *re-enters and comes down.* JOANNA *not perceiving her, sits and resumes her letter, reading as she writes*) "Safe in the privacy of a crowd, an ardent welcome is assured you." (*sees PEGGY and ceases abruptly, folds her letter*) "Captain Lovell." (*takes the wafer from PEGGY and secures the letter*) Mind you place it out of sight, and deliver it when he shall be alone (*gives it and rises*) I'll slip out through your chamber and across the yard. (*goes R.*) So shall I escape Mr. Goodlake, who is in his most devoted mood this morning. (*kisses her hand*) Good-bye, sweet, till to-night. (*exit upper R.*) PEGGY *goes to the press and climbs on a chair*)

PEGGY. (*reflectively*) "Safe in the privacy of a crowd, an ardent welcome is assured you." I long to see what she is like. (*she places the letter on the top shelf*)

Enter MRS. D. lower R.

MRS. D. (*seeing her*) And what mischief is it now?

PEGGY. (*springing down*) Naught to what is brewing. Listen. (*drags her down*) I am bound for the ball at Belsize to-night in a mask, and Mrs. Goodlake's second best Buttercup Satin. Ha, ha! Just think of it.

MRS. D. (*aghast*) You're bound for Bedlam, I'm thinking. What sort of madness is this?

PEGGY. (*capering about, excitedly*) The sort that makes one want to peep at the gay sights. To laugh—to dance—

to dress in a long train just once—and then to come back home and be good for ever—ever after.

MRS. D. And think you I'll be a party to any such—

PEGGY. *(clapping her hands over MRS. D.'s mouth)* Without doubt. *(forces her into chair, then kneels, keeping her mouth covered)* First, you'll order Kit to take charge of me. Then, when Mr. Embury's gone to bed, and you've helped me to dress, you'll see me safe out by the side door. *(removes her hands and springs up)* You know you are fairly dying for a sight of me in Mrs. Goodlake's Buttercup Satin.

MRS. D. I protest you're crazy.

PEGGY. *(pretending to cry)* Ah! Then it is you fear that I shall look a fright.

MRS. D. *(rising)* A fright forsooth! *(proudly)* Why, there's no such face and figure in all England. *(relenting)* And if I thought you'd—you'd—not be recognised.

PEGGY. *(flinging her arms about her and swinging her round)* I won't be recognised, I promise you. I must needs dress up my hair.

MRS. D. *(L. suddenly)* The hair pad would help your disguise. *(goes to the table for it)* And put her Goodlake ladyship fairly out of countenance. *(produces it)* See, one pins it on, then the hair is powdered and stretched across.

PEGGY. *(clasping her hands)* Isn't it divine? *(puts pad on chair near press)* I wonder shall I be able to dance the proper steps. Ah! Kit shall show me. *(she runs to lower door R. and shouts)* Kit! Kit! Come here at once.

Enter KIT.

KIT. Is the house a-fire?

PEGGY. No, 'tis I who am a-fire, and I've a mind to burn myself out, so no cold water.

MRS. D. She is for going to the ball.

PEGGY. *(to KIT)* By Mrs. Deborah's orders, and you're to take me, but I must see I know how to move my feet to the latest tune. So do you play. *(she fetches the fiddle and thrusts it in his hands)* Quick, quick, dear Kit. Just fancy you are my partner, and I am your—your—lady-love.

KIT. Very well, Miss Peggy. Now, right over there, please. *(she goes extreme L.)* Right foot forward. Bend low.

He strikes a chord, then makes an elaborate bow. She imitates it, then he commences to play something to Gavotte time, not too slowly, dancing and calling out directions. This dance occupies in all about 32 bars of music. PEGGY gets rapidly into the spirit of the dance, and MRS. D. stands applauding.

At the height of the scene the door is pushed open, and CAPTAIN LOVELL accompanied by SIR HARRY TRIMBLESTONE stands on the threshold. SIR HARRY is a dandy of about 35. LOVELL looks a little older, but handsomer and more commanding than in Act I.

SIR H. (R.C., applauding) Bravo ! Bravo !

PEGGY gives a loud exclamation, the music stops, and all turn in dismay.

MRS. D. (down L. apologetically) My cousin Kit has a taste for music, gentlemen, and is for diverting himself and us once in a way. But I beg you'll not inform on us.

LOVELL. (coming down C.) We are dumb as oysters, Mrs. Deborah. (she curtseys, then crosses, and taking KIT's arm, they go off lower R.)

LOVELL. (approaches PEGGY deferentially) I ask your pardon for our intrusion.

PEGGY. (L. coldly) Oh, it does not matter, seeing you won't tell.

TRIMBLESTONE has wandered down R. and is ogling PEGGY.

LOVELL. Since my uncle is not here, we'll take our leave.

SIR H. Hang it all, not till I've been introduced.

LOVELL. (giving him an angry glance) Permit me to present Sir Harry Trimblestone. My uncle's ward, Miss Britain.

SIR H. 'Pon honour, I'm charmed. We're a pair of bunglers to have cut short that pretty fandango. Let's have the old fellow out and start again. (crosses to C. towards PEGGY) Spun me, if I don't join in the fling.

LOVELL. (swinging him back to R.) Harry, stop it ! (to PEGGY) The rocking of the coach has shifted the few brains my friend started with.

SIR H. Coach be hanged ! 'Tis the glance from Beauty's eyes.

LOVELL. (C. sternly) Harry, stop it !

SIR H. (nudging LOVELL) Want to play the game alone, eh, Georgy ? Better let us cut for it. Well, I'll give you the deal, but hark ye, play fair, and no cheating for the odd trick. (bowing to PEGGY) Au revoir, Miss Britain. (she curtseys, TRIMBLESTONE goes up to door) Oh, but you're a sly dog, Georgy, a sly dog. (exit)

LOVELL. Forgive me that I suffered that nincompoop to enter. That you would be the first to give me welcome, was a pleasure I'd not counted on.

PEGGY. (smiling) Faith, my memory must be very bad, for I do not remember having welcomed you at all.

LOVELL. Then 'tis not too late to repair the omission. (smiles)

PEGGY. (archly) True. And how, sir, would you prefer the ceremony should be conducted? (makes a sweeping curtsey, and affects the tone of a fashionable lady) I protest, Captain Lovell, that the sight of you is monstrous pleasing. Or like this? (takes the extended hand) Oh, I cannot say it if you look so serious. What is the matter? Are you trying to recall my features? I can't have changed so much.

LOVELL. (admiringly) No—and yet, 'tis wonderful. (turns)

PEGGY. I'm glad you think me improved. (goes to him) You do, don't you?

LOVELL. Improved? Amazingly improved. (approaching her)

PEGGY. (backing to table) Do you still sing and play on the harpsichord?

LOVELL. (nodding) When I find an inspiring listener.

PEGGY. Ah, you remind me, I've a letter for you. 'Twas left in my charge. Shall I fetch it?

LOVELL. Nay, I warrant it'll keep. (crosses to R.)

PEGGY. (following him) But I promised to give it to you.

LOVELL. (turning) I'd rather you gave me something else. One of those purple hyacinths, for instance. (points to her bodice)

PEGGY. (shaking her head) I've given half away already.

LOVELL. To a man?

PEGGY. (seriously) To the best man in the whole world.

LOVELL. Did you keep the shamrocks?

PEGGY. (as if trying to remember) Shamrocks? (carelessly) Oh, yours. Of what use is it to keep withered blossoms when one may gather fresh? (takes advantage of his turn to dart to press and seize the green book. He turns abruptly, and she continues with embarrassment) You had better let me give you the letter. It might contain a message from—er—from your lady love. (she goes to the press and stands on a chair)

LOVELL. It might if she existed, but she does not exist.

PEGGY. That is untrue. Sister Joanna—sweet sister Joanna, has told me all about it.

LOVELL. (in alarm) Joanna has told you?

PEGGY. About your friend, your lady love. Yes. (she gets the letter from the shelf) Take your letter, Captain Lovell. (jumps down from chair)

LOVELL. (taking it reluctantly) Why do you call me Captain Lovell? 'Twas George two years ago.

PEGGY. Yes, but I've improved since then. "Amazingly improved." (enter PETER at back. He carries a large square

basket. He is about to cross to R.) What is it, Peter? (she lays the book down)

PETER. A basket sent over from Mr. Goodlake's. 'Twill likely be the yellow turnips.

PEGGY. Leave it here, so I may attend to it. (PETER places basket down and goes out at back. *Until he is off she stands with her finger on her lips, smiling mysteriously at LOVELL, then she bounds towards the basket, kneels, undoes the fastenings, and peeps within, then springs to her feet, and claps her hands*) It is! It is! It is!

LOVELL. (*in perplexity*) Is what?

PEGGY. You swear you'll not tell my guardian?

LOVELL. (*solemnly*) I swear.

PEGGY. It is a prodigious secret, and very wicked. I am going to the Masquerade Ball to-night, and Mrs. Goodlake has lent me a gown. See! (*she opens the basket and pulls out a yellow satin gown, a mask, and a jewel box, and a pair of satin shoes*)

LOVELL. You'll not go unattended?

PEGGY. To be sure not. (*proudly*) I have an escort.

LOVELL. (*starting*) An escort! How dare the fellow presume?

PEGGY. But 'twas no fault of Kit's. I insisted, and Mrs. Deborah would trust me with none other.

LOVELL. (*slightly mollified*) Oh, it's Kit, is it? 'Tis likely he'd not object if I played deputy.

PEGGY. What? Are you then going to the ball?

LOVELL. If you are.

PEGGY. (*coldly*) You forget. Your lady love might object, I'll go with Kit, I thank you. And meanwhile I'll leave you alone to read your letter. (*she gathers up all the finery in her arms, then after curtsying, she goes off upper R.; she returns immediately and seizes the green book which she had forgotten. She places it on the bundle in her arms and again goes off; LOVELL glances carelessly at the letter in his hand, then he opens it. He is standing now by the empty basket*)

LOVELL. Nay, I'll not read it, but send it whence it came. (*crushes the letter, tosses it into the basket and shuts the lid, then kicks basket over to R.*) That shall be my answer.

Enter EMBURY at back.

EMBURY. (*warmly*) Ah, nephew, welcome, welcome.

LOVELL. (*R., going forward*) Your humble servant, sir, (*starts on looking at EMBURY*) I swear I'm under a spell, or the pendulum has been swinging backward. Everyone I meet seems to have been touched by a magic wand.

EMBURY. (*innocently*) Strange, yet I fancy I've remarked it myself. 'Tis probably the salubrity of the climate—or the water. Our water is uncommon pure. We face the north, but that is corrected in my new abode.

LOVELL. So you're shifting quarters, sir.

EMBURY. (*goes to chair B. of table nervously*) Yes, the truth is, I'm contemplating a change in my mode of life.

LOVELL. Indeed?

EMBURY. 'Tis a man's duty to marry, George; he owes that much to—to—

LOVELL. To his offspring. True, sir, I take yours to be a sudden resolution.

EMBURY. On the contrary, when two years ago, I secured the services of the worthy Mrs. Deborah, it was but the first move in a well considered plan.

LOVELL. So the lady is already an inmate of your house? (EMBURY *nods*) Is she aware of your intentions!

EMBURY. Not yet. Though I venture to hope she will not be averse to them.

LOVELL. I give you joy, uncle. And from the little I've seen of your future wife, I take the liberty of pronouncing it a most sensible choice.

EMBURY. There is some disparity in the matter of years.

LOVELL. (*cherrily*) She'll be the better qualified to do her part.

EMBURY. (*placing a hand on LOVELL's shoulder*) And now we must to your affairs. This new venture will not disturb our compact. You were to receive a settlement on your return. If—if—Tell me, George, can you with a clear conscience, claim the reward?

LOVELL. (*earnestly*) I can, sir. (*they clasp hands*)

EMBURY. Come, we'll to the study. I'd have the benefit of your judgment in the matter of wall papers. (*takes his arm and goes up c.*)

LOVELL. (*smiling*) Wall papers! Had you not best consult the lady who is destined to gaze on them, sir?

EMBURY. No. I'd take her by surprise when all is finished. 'Tis hard to choose a flower or colour for one who loves them all.

LOVELL. Yet she'll surely have a preference. Think.

EMBURY. To be sure. It is the purple hyacinth. (*he unconsciously touches those in his coat*)

LOVELL. (*starting*) The purple hyacinth!

EMBURY. Yes. She wears them in her bodice. (LOVELL *averts his head, overcome by his discovery*) Come, let us search the patterns. (LOVELL *remains stupefied*; EMBURY *opens the door*). What is it, lad?

LOVELL. Nothing, sir, except I have a fancy to take a turn alone in the garden.

EMBURY. Alone? (*laughs*) Faith, 'tis as if we changed places. Mark Embury, the flighty youth, with stern George Lovell for his uncle. (*Goes out.* LOVELL gives a glance at the door R. then with a heavy sigh, strides to back and exits)

(PEGGY now peeps from the door upper R. then enters; she has put on the satin gown; it is too large, and she excitedly tries to adjust it to her figure. She carries the mask and jewel box, after placing them on table, she fetches the looking-glass from press, and hair pad from chair, returns to the table, places the looking-glass against the small flour barrel, which is still on table. She then kneels, pins the hair pad on, and stretches her curls across it)

PEGGY. (*surveying herself*) 'Tis elegant, but where can I procure the powder? (*she sighs, rises, and catches sight of the flour barrel; she dips her hands in and gets some flour, with which she daubs her hair; Next she tries the mask, then removes it*) Now for the ornaments. (*opens the jewel box*) I warrant she will have jewels—his lady love. I would I could outshine her. (*takes out a pair of earrings*) Earrings! How beautiful! If only I could wear them. I wonder if it is so hard to make holes in one's ears. (*she runs to MRS. DEBORAH'S workbasket, which is in press; she finds a long needle, then returns to the mirror, where after one or two feints she plunges the needle into her ear, and immediately gives vent to a loud shriek.*

(*Enter LOVELL quickly at back. She turns and faces him defiantly.*)

LOVELL. I thought I heard a cry.

PEGGY. Yes. I met with an accident. I stuck a needle in my ear.

LOVELL. Go and remove that gown, I beg of you.

PEGGY. (*petulantly*) 'Tis necessary I should try it on, if it is to fit. (*archly*) Think you it becomes me? (*crosses to R. trailing and surveying her train*)

LOVELL. (*L.*) Uncommonly well, yet you must not go to the Masquerade in it.

PEGGY. (*R.*) In what then?

LOVELL. In nothing. (*quickly*) I mean you must not go at all.

PEGGY. (*coquettishly*) Unless I go with you. Is that it?

LOVELL. I—I—cannot. I dare not take you now.

PEGGY. (*astonished*) Indeed? Yet 'twas only a short time

since you seemed so anxious. Perhaps it is that you've had news since then.

LOVELL. Yes. I have had—news—since then.

PEGGY. What news?

LOVELL. 'Tis not for me to tell you.

PEGGY. Yet it is on this account you dissuade me from the ball. (*he gravely nods*) Then maybe I fathom it. It is that *she* is for going, and would claim your whole attention. Was that the message in the letter?

LOVELL. (*perplexed*) The letter? (*suddenly remembering*) Oh, I know not what was in the letter. I did not read it.

PEGGY. (*quietly*) Then you are not going to marry her?

LOVELL. Her?

PEGGY. The lady Mrs. Goodlake did refer to.

LOVELL. (*smiling*) No. There is a most decided obstacle. (*aside*) Thank God!

PEGGY. But you will marry somebody—some day?

LOVELL. Oh yes. If Fate decrees it. But I warrant you it will be no love match, now.

PEGGY. What for will you marry then?

LOVELL. (*recklessly*) Who knows? For money—position—to please my uncle, may be. (*laughs bitterly*) Yes, that's it, it shall be for money, Peggy—for money, and my uncle may choose the bride.

PEGGY. In the meantime I see no reason you should forego the ball.

LOVELL. I must forego it, and so must you.

PEGGY. (*hotly*) And if I refuse?

LOVELL. Then I must try and forget that you have made me your secret confidant.

PEGGY. You will tell my guardian?

LOVELL. You know that I will never do so.

PEGGY. (*lightly*) Then I shall go.

LOVELL. Then I must go with you to see you come to no mischief.

PEGGY. What! You'd make a duty of it. Nay, I'm not inclined to have your sacrifice. (*laughs, half hysterically*) I warrant you. I'll not go begging for a partner. (*storming*) How dare you think I ever meant to let you take me? (*playfully*) You must have a fine conceit of yourself. (*Begins to cry*) You may go—or stay as you please, but I vow I'll not speak to you the whole night, and so you may be free to enjoy your "ardent welcome." Oh, I wager she'll be there, and so shall I, mark you. (*stamps her foot, still crying*) So shall I.

(The back door opens, and EMBURY enters. PEGGY has her back turned, but hearing the door open, she quickly goes off upper R. ; and as EMBURY comes down he is in time to catch a full view of the yellow silk train, as it escapes through the door. His brow contracts, and he looks at LOVELL as if for an explanation. There is a pause. EMBURY carries in his hand small rolls of wall paper)

EMBURY. I thought you went to walk in the garden.

LOVELL. I returned.

EMBURY. *(with a motion towards the door R.)* You dismiss your visitors rather unceremoniously.

LOVELL. *(quietly)* I have had no visitors, sir.

EMBURY. When neighbours come to wait upon my household—or myself, they are not ashamed to go out by the chief door.

LOVELL. I did not say there'd been a neighbour here.

EMBURY. Neither my ward nor my housekeeper are wont to drag a couple of yards of silken train behind them. *(angrily)* I protest, sir, against having my house used for candlestone meetings.

LOVELL. And I deny having used it for such a purpose.

EMBURY. Then the lady who had so evident a wish to remain undiscovered, was—

LOVELL. I cannot tell you, uncle.

EMBURY. Your answer is sufficient. That this intimacy remains unbroken is vile enough. *(raises his voice)* But that you should have given me the lie just now—should have sought to trick and cheat me, that I might replenish your resources, is—

LOVELL. *(emphatically)* Hold, sir !

Enter GOODLAKE at back.

GOOD. Hallo ! Who is it that's training his lungs for the post of town crier ? Gad, is it you, Lovell ? Then I've missed the coach and Harry too. *(to EMBURY)* Has Joanna been here ?

EMBURY. *(hesitating)* I have but this moment left my study, but Captain Lovell may be able to tell you.

LOVELL. I have not seen her.

(EMBURY stares at him with contempt. Enter MRS. DEBORAH lower R. with table cloth, which she places in press)

GOOD. Have you seen aught of my wife, Mrs. Deborah ?

MRS. D. Aye, she was here a short while since. She left by the side door and went across the yard. *(exit R.)*

GOOD. Got tired of waiting for me, I'll be sworn. Come back home with me, Lovell, and break the back of her spleen.

EMBURY. 'Tis impossible. Captain Lovell is suddenly recalled to town. He leaves here on the moment.

GOOD. (*in surprise*) Eh, what's that?

LOVELL. (*proudly*) It is as my uncle has said. I leave this house on the moment. I bid you good day, Mr. Goodlake. (*turns to EMBURY*) And you, Sir, good-bye. (*goes out abruptly*; GOODLAKE raises his eyebrows and whistles)

GOOD. What's up, man? Has he been poaching on your preserves? Strike me, if I haven't expected it all along. (*EMBURY gives him a silencing look, and he quickly changes the subject*) Well, did you get the turnips? (*turns and sees basket*) Yes, and damme, if they haven't sent 'em in my best travelling hamper. (*crosses to R.*) Here, help me unload. (*pulls basket towards him and slightly raises the lid*) Why, 'tis unloaded already. Then I'll bear it back.

EMBURY. Let Peter carry it.

GOOD. Nay, if a man would have no tricks played on his property, he'd best keep his eye on't. As for you, Mark Embury, you take my advice. Marry the baggage, and so put her out of harm's way. (*goes up to door*) Remember the lines of our new Scotch poet—"The best laid schemes of Mice and Men gang aft agley." (*exit. EMBURY closes door after GOODLAKE, then goes down thoughtfully to table, and unrolls his patterns of wall paper*)

EMBURY. Poor Roger! (*enter PEGGY R. She has resumed her ordinary attire*) Ah, Peggy! I am glad you are come in. (*looks at her tenderly*) Do you know why? (*unrolls paper and places it on the table*)

PEGGY. It is because you are alone. Of late you have not cared so much to be alone.

EMBURY. You've noticed that, have you? 'Tis strange how a man may change, Peggy. Aye, even a Philosopher.

PEGGY. Are you a Philosopher, guardian?

EMBURY. I've held myself to be such. (*timidly*) But there are times when I am crossed by—by doubt.

PEGGY. (*reflectively*) I've noticed the doubts too.

EMBURY. (*smiling*) You have grown to be a minute observer.

PEGGY. One always does those one loves. ☺

EMBURY. (*rising*) And you love me? (*eagerly*)

PEGGY. Indeed I do.

EMBURY. (*fervently*) God bless you, pretty one. (*places his hand on her head*)

PEGGY. (*beginning to cry*) Oh, please don't.

EMBURY. (*startled*) Why not? Why not, Peggy?

PEGGY. (*crying*) I don't deserve it. am so—so monstrous wicked.

EMBURY. (*relieved*) Dear, dear, dear. Is that all? So you are monstrous wicked, are you? (*smiles and places a chair, which he takes from writing-table at back*) Perhaps your morals will grow stronger, if they're allowed to sit. (*she sits*).

PEGGY. (*suddenly*) I promise you I shall be quite good to-morrow, and ever—ever afterwards.

EMBURY. (*in mock seriousness*) Then I don't know but what Satan is entitled to to-day. (*he takes chair from large table and sits near PEGGY*) You remember that a while ago I spoke of something I had to tell you.

PEGGY. I fancy I have since divined it. You planned to surprise me, did you not?

EMBURY. If you are not surprised, then will my task be easier. Have you ever dreamed, child? (*she nods*) So have I. Some time ago I dreamed an all absorbing dream. It involved the training of a girl to my idea of perfect womanhood. In working out my plan I may have strayed somewhat from the letter of my intention, but the spirit I preserved. (*touches her hand carelessly*) Yes, the spirit is preserved, for the maid is all—all—(*with a little sigh*) well, all I wish her. Still my design is incomplete, till the maid becomes a wife. (*softly*) So you see it rests with her to waken me, or bid me dream on—happily on, for ever. (*rises*) I had not intended to tell you my dream story so soon, but it has been pointed out to me that the time has come when you should have a more absolute protection than that of a mere guardian. (*goes down L. C.*)

PEGGY. (*thoughtfully*) And is that why you sent for him to come here?

EMBURY. (*turning*) Sent for whom?

PEGGY. (*in a low voice*) Captain George.

EMBURY. Not precisely. Though 'tis true that, believing him worthy, I just now confided something of my plans to him.

PEGGY. (*starting up*) You told him what you had in mind? (*EMBURY nods—she droops her head*) And the news shocked—disappointed him, did it not?

EMBURY. On the contrary, he seemed well pleased.

PEGGY. (*looking up*) You mean that he agreed? (*her eyes flash*) Ah! You offered him money—money!

EMBURY. I promised him a settlement.

PEGGY. And for that he pretended he was willing—(*aside*) to marry me.

EMBURY. I scarce see the importance of his opinion on the subject. The present and vital question is your willing-

ness. The delicacy of my position renders it impossible I should plead with, or urge you, for a sense of gratitude might impel you to that which would render you miserable. And so, pretty one, if you say yes, your heart must echo your tongue, else you will make me wretched also. Look at me, child. See how I hang on your reply.

PEGGY. (*bewildered*) Am I then to give it to you?

EMBURY. Surely. To whom else?

PEGGY (*shaking her head*) Then it is—is—No! (*his face falls*) I'll form no part of his plan to get money. Tell him that I do not love him. (EMBURY *looks startled*) Nay, that I hate him—hate him. (*bursts into tears, then turns on a sudden impulse*) But don't—don't—let him believe it. Oh, you understand. (*throws herself in a fit of hysterical weeping into EMBURY'S arms*)

EMBURY. Yes. I—I—understand. (*to himself*) "The best laid schemes of Mice and Men." (*he stands calmly gazing into space, and stroking her hair gently, as the curtain falls*)

END OF 2ND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*The Masquerade Ball at Belsize House. The ante-room, with a view of the gardens lighted by coloured lanterns at back; door leading to cardroom at upper L.; wide door or arch leading to ballroom at upper R.; chair down L., another near arch.*

As curtain rises a noise of money being thrown and laughter from cardroom and exclamations "Try again," "No, no!" "I'll bet a guinea," etc.; instruments are being tuned in the ballroom, and at back there is a group of gaily dressed girls and rakish-looking men; some have fancy costumes, some wear masks; they are loudly laughing and exchanging greetings; presently one girl breaks away, then enters and goes towards ballroom, saying: "Oh, very well, then I'll dance by myself"; one of the men runs after her; then a girl with two men follow. They all go off R.. The others remain at back C. SIR HARRY TRIMBLESTONE, accompanied by a fair and a dark girl, enters C., pushing his way through the group; then the group disperses—all except two—one man and one woman; these follow SIR HARRY on and stand near sofa, talking to two others who rise.

SIR H. (*dropping the girls' arms*) Nay, my charmers, I never take more than one partner at a time. I'll to the cardroom and cut, to see which of you, diamonds or spades, has first choice of me.

Group at sofa laugh and chat; SIR HARRY exits upper L. and is greeted with shouts from within: "Ha! Here's Harry! He'll change the luck." "Throw him out." "No, no," etc. The two girls glance disdainfully after SIR HARRY; one says "The idea—but who cares?" the other says "Not I." An old Beau now enters at back; he approaches them and says, "Ladies, can you tell me—;" they seize him, one on each side, one says "Yes, we'll tell you," the other "Better, we'll show you;" they run him off to ballroom; group follows and stands in entrance. Enter at back KIT BARNIGER with his fiddle; he is accompanied by PEGGY in the yellow satin gown and powdered hair; she carries her mask.

KIT. (*going down R.*) Come along, Miss Peggy.

PEGGY. (*L., excitedly*) Oh, 'tis the divinest place under heaven, Kit. Though I had not thought there were quite so many people in the world. You must find me a partner.

KIT. (*perplexed*) A partner?

PEGGY. To be sure, and right quickly. And hark ye : he must engage to pay me most marked attention ; so go and procure me a pleasing young man, no—old man—no, young man—(*turns*) which, think you, is the more dependable when it comes to making spurious love? (*music starts a gavotte*)

KIT. (*thoughtfully*) I protest—I think they are equally proficient there. (*group exits to ballroom*)

PEGGY. (*going to back and looking off R.*) Look at the millions of lights. And hear the music. Oh, Kit, it is more diverting even than church. (*he moves down R., she follows closely*) You are not going yet? (*he halts*) It isn't that I'm frightened. (*tremblingly*) But I—I—like not to be left alone. (*she draws him down C.*)

Two more enter from back and exit to ballroom.

KIT. No, no, but the dance is on, and I am much belated. (*he begins mechanically to move to the music*) Oh, dearie me ! Wait ! I'll find you a seat near the musicians, where you may sit and watch.

PEGGY. (*tossing her head*) Faith ! I'm not come to ball to sit in a corner and watch ; so hurry and capture me a partner.

Enter SIR HARRY TRIMBLESTONE from cardroom.

SIR. H. (*C., overhearing*) Spun me, but that were an easy task. (*starts*) As I live, 'tis the little Britain ! (*bows and comes between them*)

PEGGY. (*suddenly*) Why, you'll do splendidly.

SIR H. Do? I'll wager I'm done for already. Shall I have the honour of the next gavotte, most lovely Peggy?

PEGGY. In truth you shall. (*crosses to R.*) You may go, Kit, Sir Harry will take care of me till you return. (*aside to KIT*) If I take fright at him, I'll scream out. (*exit KIT, R. ; turns*) You are surprised to see me here?

SIR H. (*L.*) A meeting with Hebe herself had not more staggered me.

PEGGY. (*R., shaking her head*) I am not acquainted with Hebe, but your cousin, Mistress Goodlake, is she not here?

SIR H. Joanna ! Lord, I wager not.

PEGGY. You speak as if 'twere not a proper place. Why, then are you here yourself?

SIR H. There's a difference, my pretty one. Hang me, if I don't believe you stole away on the chance of meeting me.

PEGGY. (*laughing and backing*) Think you that? Then you are even a sillier man than I first conceived you. I believe I came because one who had no right to my obedience ventured to forbid it.

SIR H. Was it Mr. Embury?

PEGGY. (*loftily*) No. Had he forbidden me, I should not have come. And that is why I took care he should know nothing about it. (*two girls and a man cross at back from R. to L., pausing an instant at the opening; LOVELL appears at the back, he stands looking among the promenaders; PEGGY turns and sees him, she then turns to SIR HARRY and runs on in a loud voice*) You flatter me, Sir Harry. (*he looks astonished*) Though your remarks are vastly pleasing.

LOVELL, *attracted by her voice, comes down; the music is heard faintly.*

LOVELL. (L.) Ah, Harry, so 'tis you, eh?

SIR H. (C.) It is, and curse you for a meddler.

LOVELL. It seems I've just come in time—in time to relieve you. Miss Britain will be my charge for the rest of the evening. (*crosses to C.*)

SIR H. (L.) You ride a high horse, sir.

LOVELL. (*significantly*) I ride nothing I'm not master of.

SIR H. (*smiling*) Except your temper, eh—Georgy? I'll return anon—and claim from Miss Britain the fulfilment of her promise—(*bows*)—till our gavotte. (*exit to cardroom; there is an embarrassed pause, then LOVELL turns to PEGGY very authoritatively*)

LOVELL. (L.) You will put on your mask.

PEGGY. (R.) I will, when it so pleases me. (*he turns away angrily to chair*) I thought you had gone to London.

LOVELL. Pardon me, but you knew to the contrary. Your obstinate determination to come here—

PEGGY. Compels you to postpone your departure. (*he bows*) You are quite sure you are come here to look at me?

LOVELL. (*brusquely*) Not to look at you, but to look after you!

PEGGY. (*sarcastically*) I'm profoundly grateful, but as I do not need your protection, you are excused—you are excused. (*she waves him away, he remains perfectly still, she moves towards ballroom, he follows her; she halts abruptly*) Would you go?

LOVELL. (*folding his arms*) Where you go.

PEGGY. (*petulantly*) Then I go nowhere. I shall stay here. (*crosses to R.; he bows*) Perhaps you'd not object should I sit down? (*he crosses behind her, takes the chair and places it with a jerk at her back; then he fetches the chair R. for himself; they sit; there is a pause; business*) What did you say?

LOVELL. (R.) I said nothing.

PEGGY. (L.) 'Tis a good plan when one knows not how to talk divertingly. (*pause*) It is an uncommon fine evening.

LOVELL. Is that my first lesson in the art of conversation?

PEGGY. (*after another pause*) Why did you leave our house so abruptly to-day?

LOVELL. My uncle gave me no invitation to remain.

PEGGY. But there was a dispute, was there not?

LOVELL. He told you so much, eh?

PEGGY. No; he did not mention you. (*pauses and blushes*) Save once. And then, he wandered from the house; nor have I seen him since.

LOVELL. Then how—

PEGGY. Before you left I heard angry voices, and the words "trick" and "cheat" reached my ears.

LOVELL. Do you know in what manner I cheated him?

PEGGY. No; but I fancy it was about a woman.

LOVELL. Yes; it was about a woman.

PEGGY. (*pauses*) The woman you are in love with?

LOVELL. Yes; the quarrel *was* concerning the woman I am in love with.

PEGGY. Is she here to-night?

LOVELL. Yes.

PEGGY. Why don't you seek her?

LOVELL. I have sought her already.

PEGGY. And cannot find her. (*rises*) That is why you came to me. I pray you go and send Sir Harry Trimblestone back to me.

LOVELL. (*rising*) I'll do nothing of the kind. Harry is no fit companion for you. (*swings his chair back to its original position*)

PEGGY. (*laughing*) On that I don't agree. I think him most bewitching.

LOVELL. (*angrily*) Such an avowal should shame a girl who is all but betrothed.

PEGGY. (*raising her eyebrows*) All but betrothed!

LOVELL. You must be aware that my uncle—your guardian—has formed certain plans. That he has hopes of—

PEGGY. Oh yes, but I scarce favour the notion of having a husband chosen for me. (*crosses to R.*)

LOVELL. (L. *with a glance of hopeful expectation*) You mean you will decline—

PEGGY. (*indignantly*) You appear uncommon relieved at the thought.

LOVELL. I am, sweet Peggy—I am—because——

PEGGY. (*almost crying with indignation*) Then how dare you, sir, have the audacity——

General murmur in ballroom with following snatches :

"The garden"—"Yes."—"No."—"Come along."—

"Wait."—"Ha, ha!" etc.

LOVELL. (*with contrition*) Forgive me ! Indeed, I had no thought to offend you. Sh ! the dancers are coming. Put on your mask, and I will show you the gardens.

PEGGY. (*putting on mask*) No ; I am going to Kit. He is looking for me.

LOVELL. But you'll let me lead you through the next dance ?

PEGGY. I see. You'll dance with me if she do not come ?

LOVELL. I know no *she*—and I'll dance with you or none——

PEGGY. (*coquettishly*) Sure ?

LOVELL. Sure. You'll find me here. You will come back ?

PEGGY. (*coquettishly*) Perhaps. (*goes and returns*) Sure ?

LOVELL. Sure.

PEGGY. Then—perhaps——(*goes*)

The old man with one of the girls comes back from ball-room to garden, followed by the other girl and two men ; one of them nods to LOVELL, they go off to gardens ; two girls and man cross from L. to R. ; two men come from cardroom and go off back L., joining others who are passing and repassing at back ; after returning nod LOVELL walks across meditatively from R. to L.

LOVELL. (*walking across*) She said perhaps ; then I'll wait. (*as he does so JOANNA GOODLAKE enters from back ; she sees LOVELL ; as he turns again to cross to R. she puts on her mask, steps down and touches him on shoulder*)

JOANNA. (*R. tenderly*) George ! (*he turns with a joyful exclamation*)

LOVELL. (*L.*) What ! Back so soon ? (*JOANNA unmask, and he steps back in surprise*)

JOANNA. Back ? I've this moment come, and it would seem I had taken you unawares.

LOVELL. 'Tis a surprise, I own.

JOANNA. So you did not get my invitation ? Then how comes it you are here ?

LOVELL. (*hesitatingly*) I came because I—I——

JOANNA. You had a premonition I'd be here. (*sentimentally*) It has been a lifetime, George, since you've been gone.

LOVELL. (*prosaically*) No—only two years. How does everybody? How does Mr. Goodlake?

JOANNA. (*with an uneasy laugh*) Mr. Goodlake! In truth I scarce know. Though I had asked him had I divined your anxiety. (*he half turns away towards L.*) What is the matter, George? 'Twas not thus you acted at our last meeting.

LOVELL. (*uncomfortably*) No, no, but we've grown older—and wiser. (*crosses to R.C.*)

JOANNA. (*jealously*) Is it that another has supplanted me? Think you I'll be put aside so? (*suddenly*) Ah! I remember—you said "back so soon?" Your greeting, then, was not for me. Tell me, who is she—who is she, I say?

LOVELL. There is—there is no one.

JOANNA. (*softening*) Then you love me still, George? And all is as it used to be?

LOVELL. No! All is at an end. (*she starts*) I have given my word to that effect. (*crosses to L.*)

JOANNA. (*jealously*) To whom?

LOVELL. To my uncle.

JOANNA. You dared to let him know?

LOVELL. He suspected it long ago, without my help. To-day he asked me if the past was buried. I told him yes. I—I meant it.

JOANNA. (*bitterly*) So—so it is your purse that is my rival, eh? How much did he guarantee, to make you throw me over? (*he turns away impatiently; she changes her tone*) Nay, forgive me—I did not mean it! I vow my heart is broken, George—I pray you do not turn from me. I cannot bear it. (*she bursts into tears and falls on her knees*)

LOVELL. (*he raises her*) Hush! Think where you are. (*PEGGY re-enters from ballroom unperceived, she has her domino over her arm, she stands aghast at the picture before her; JOANNA, still sobbing, has her head on LOVELL's shoulder; he tries to soothe her*) For Heaven's sake, Joanna, calm yourself.

JOANNA. 'Tis easy said. I have stooped to falsehood and strategy. I have worshipped you, and this is the end. (*sobs*)

PEGGY steals silently off at back; a noise issues from the cardroom with these expressions: "Two to one in guineas." "The bet's off," etc.

LOVELL. Somebody comes. Quick! On with your mask! (*she hurriedly puts her mask on*)

Enter SIR HARRY TRIMBLESTONE from cardroom; music recommences.

SIR H. Sink the cards! (*sees them*) How now, Georgie? I think you've had your innings, and 'tis my turn. I've just been bubbled of a goodly stake and I seek consolation. (*he approaches*) This lady owes me a dance; so get you gone. Retire.

LOVELL. (*bowing*) With her permission. (*goes off to ball-room*; JOANNA tears off her mask and faces SIR HARRY defiantly)

SIR H. (*staring in amazement*) Joanna! By all that's—

JOANNA. Aye, Joanna! Whom thought you to find here with him? Tell me that.

SIR H. Gad, cousin, not you, on my life. Crib me, if I know whether to pronounce it mirth or madness.

JOANNA. Tell me what I asked. Who is she?

SIR H. Lord, but I'm a man of honour.

JOANNA. So be it. When next you've gambled your pocket bare, and are for having me bespeak Mr. Goodlake's generosity—I'll be a woman of honour. Come! Is it yes or no—who is she?

PEGGY re-enters from back, she carries her mask and cloak.

SIR H. Sh! She is here.

JOANNA. (*falling back to R.*) As I live, the foundling brat! (*loudly to PEGGY*) Come here, you. (*PEGGY halts, then tosses her cloak on chair*)

SIR H. I've promised Miss Britain this dance, and I'll wager she has come—

PEGGY. (*stepping down*) To excuse you, Sir Harry.

SIR H. But damme, as a man of honour—

PEGGY. You'll give place to a lady; and you must perceive that your cousin desires to speak with me.

SIR H. As you please. (*bows and goes off at back*)

JOANNA. (*fiercely*) You shameless creature! You came here not to look for Sir Harry—but for George Lovell,

PEGGY. You are right. I wished to release him from further attendance on me. (*going towards L.*)

JOANNA. So you watched—you have seen—

PEGGY. I have seen no pleasant sight; of that I do assure you, madam.

JOANNA. Poor little fool! If you had half your wits, you had guessed it long ago. And so you thought to have cut me out, eh? And could not see that if he paid you attentions, 'twas but to secure your services as a go-between.

PEGGY. I vow you are the wickedest woman in the world.

JOANNA. The world! What can a low-born foundling baggage know of the world? Our world of fashion! (*goes down R.*)

PEGGY. Alas, for my sins, madam, I know more of it to-night than I had ever hoped to learn. Still, I warrant there are punishments even for you.

JOANNA. You mean that you will inform my husband.

PEGGY. So might a lady of fashion do, but a "foundling baggage" may have other notions.

JOANNA. I warn you, the brunt would not fall on me, but on him. For George Lovell to be convicted of an intrigue with me would be to ruin him for ever. So, since you love him, ponder well ere you acquaint anyone with your discovery.

PEGGY. I thank you for that reminder. I shall guard your secret.

JOANNA. Is that all you have to say?

PEGGY. No. I've this. Your—your—friendship with Captain Lovell must not continue.

JOANNA. (*laughing*) Your impudence would make me die of laughing, had I not anticipated you by casting him over. Faith, I'm wearied of the young man. 'Tis an infinite pity he can't make up to you—for when a man has had his romance, a commonplace wife is no drawback. But, of course, that is out of the question, for 'tis well-known you are destined to be the wife of the worthy Mr. Embury.

PEGGY. (*starting*) The wife of Mr. Embury!

JOANNA. For what else, think you, he has trained you? (*she sees PEGGY's astonishment*) What! He hasn't declared himself yet? Then, 'tis imprudent to play pranks like these. You risk not getting him at all. A masquerade at the notorious Belsize—the innocent Peggy, too! (*jeeringly*) Fear nothing—I shan't tell him. I fancy we shall both gain by keeping our own counsel. (*goes up and off back*)

PEGGY. (*sinks into chair in an attitude of dejection*) A go-between! I could die for shame. (*pauses*) The wife of Mr. Embury! Then it was for himself he spoke! And I—I let him know that—Oh! Lord help me! (*begins to cry*)

Enter KIT hurriedly from R.

KIT. Ah, 'tis there you are. I missed you among the crowd, so I ran away to see if you were having a merry time.

PEGGY. (*looking up through her tears*) Yes, thank you, Kit—I'm uncommon merry. I doubt if masquerades are as

wildly gay as they are presumed to be. (*rises abruptly*) Take me home, please, dear Kit. I've had enough of the ball.

KIT. (*excitedly*) Oh, dear, I pray you wait till this dance is ended.

PEGGY. Then I'll go with you, and sit in the corner; 'tis my fitting place, Kit, my fitting place. (*she takes his arm and they go off R.*)

Two men enter from cardroom, then a woman looking about her; they all go off to ballroom. The three small girls run from back into ballroom, followed by two lads; then a large group assemble at back, laughing and shouting snatches of song; then one says "Here comes Father Christmas again. Let's raffle him—no—blindfold him." Old man appears, they blindfold him and repeat refrain. GOODLAKE and EMBURY push through them, and they disappear at back into the garden; GOODLAKE is in evening dress of the period, EMBURY is in his ordinary attire.

GOOD. (*coming down L. and looking about excitedly*) Curse me if I don't think she's had warning, and made her escape. (*music ceases*)

EMBURY. (R.) 'Twould prove her delicacy to escape from this noisy den on any pretext, and I'm for following her example. (GOODLAKE protests) Nay, 'twas against my better judgment that I came with you on this errand. In truth, I scarce knew where you were bringing me; my brain has received a shock to-day, and I'm not myself.

GOOD. You'll not leave me in the lurch?

EMBURY. But should your suspicions be proved, what good can my presence do?

GOOD. Good! Dods, man! you can help me to secure my rights, by being witness to my wrongs.

EMBURY. You believe your wife to have an assignation here to-night. What grounds have you?

GOOD. A letter in her hand. I found it in an emptied basket. This letter may concern you more than you imagine, for, mark you, the basket was taken from your house. Damn it! I'd not have broken it to you, could I have broken his crown without.

EMBURY. (*quietly*) You mean that the letter is addressed to my nephew?

GOOD. You said he'd been called to town?

EMBURY. My wish was father to the thought.

GOOD. I remember—you and he had a difference. If I find him here to-night, he and I will have a greater.

EMBURY. Not at a place like this—I beg of you. For your own sake, for your wife's sake—you cannot afford to have her misconduct noised abroad. (*a burst of laughter heard from the garden, and these loud expressions from the cardroom*: “Who has the Queen?” “The devil’s in the game.”) Come, Roger, give it up. We are out of our element here, man.

GOOD. (*shaking him off*) Thunder and furies! Do you think I’m a craven?—that you can turn me from my design?

EMBURY. I seek only to save you from further degradation.

GOOD. Degradation be damned! I have a sword, Mr. Embury—and I’ve not forgotten how to use it.

EMBURY. (*emphatically*) You shall use it in no unequal contest—that I swear—and you are no match for Lovell. (*authoritatively*) Since you have brought me into this, I’ll see you through. (*a burst of laughter comes from garden and ballroom*)

LOVELL. (*outside*) It’s getting late. I beg of you to come home.

GOOD. (*crossing to look off R.*) What’s that? I’d give a thousand pounds to catch them now together. (*turning*) God! Embury, if there isn’t some mistake, I beg you, in mercy, to crack me on the skull, for I could not live without her. (*EMBURY lays a hand on his shoulder*) ’Tis hard for you to comprehend, neighbour. You know not what it is to love a woman as I love Joanna. (*EMBURY sighs, GOODLAKE blows his nose*) Pshaw! I’m a weak-pated fool—like all blusterers.

EMBURY. (*L. quietly*) Aye, you are a weak-pated fool—and you are in better company than you are aware of.

Enter two women from R., they go off C.; then LOVELL and PEGGY enter from ballroom; he has her cloak on his arm, and he is urging her to put it on; she is masked, she takes the cloak from him and tosses it on to a chair; GOODLAKE turns abruptly.

GOOD. (*under his breath*) By God! Embury. There they are! (*makes a rush forward, EMBURY pulls him back*)

EMBURY. Wait. You must be sure. The woman is masked. (*steps in front of him*)

GOOD. Her gown isn’t masked. I’d know it among a thousand.

EMBURY. Stand aside. (*he swings GOODLAKE round to L., then advances*) You cover your face, Captain Lovell. It would seem that instinct had outlived habit, for shame is scarce an attribute of a libertine.

PEGGY makes a rush forward ; LOVELL pulls her back, then gets in front of her, and comes down in her place)

LOVELL. (R.C. removing his mask) I take no unfair advantage, sir ; and since I perceive that you yourself are without a mask, my features are at your service—but I beg you'll state your wishes briefly, for it is my present duty to see a lady home.

EMBURY. (L.C.) 'Tis neither your duty nor your privilege, so be good enough to leave this lady to her lawful protector. (points to GOODLAKE) Or, as his representative, I will undertake to settle this affair myself. (PEGGY makes another forward movement)

LOVELL. (again waves her back) Threats serve an ill purpose with me, sir ; nor am I wont to take orders, except on parade. But grant me ten minutes in which to carry out my purpose, and I promise you to return and bear the consequences of my refusal.

GOOD. (furiously) Let me to the coxcomb.

EMBURY. (C. driving him back) Not here.

LOVELL. (R.) My uncle is right. Our differences will not spoil for keeping, and 'tis no exhibition for a lady. (turns in and takes PEGGY'S arm)

EMBURY. Look you, Captain Lovell, this matter cannot end with a scratch of your sword, or of mine. (LOVELL halts and turns) You shall be exposed to your mess room, and if there be any gentlemen among your intimates, they shall decline your further acquaintance. Now, once for all, will you surrender this lady?

LOVELL. I will not. Moreover, I challenge Mr. Goodlake's right to interfere.

GOOD. (dashing towards EMBURY) I'll take a hand in this—stand back—I say. (swings EMBURY over to R., then goes up and seizes PEGGY by the arm) Come to your home, madam.

PEGGY shakes him off and comes boldly forward ; GOODLAKE drops down L. ; LOVELL goes up.

PEGGY. (snatching off her mask) Not so rough, Mr. Goodlake—by your leave. (GOODLAKE and EMBURY both draw back in amazement ; she comes C.) 'Twould seem that my presence here calls for explanation. It is soon given. Being uncommon curious to see a masquerade, I entreated Captain Lovell to be my escort. I know full well my conduct calls for reprimand, but the right to administer it, I concede to only one. (she casts down her eyes and turns to EMBURY) He will punish me as he sees fit.

GOOD. (L., turning to EMBURY whose eyes are bent on PEGGY) A pretty jade you've reared, on my life ! (EMBURY raises his hand to invoke silence) But I'm not to be put off the scent. It is a trick—a put-up scheme. I'll swear my wife is here and that she came to meet this scapegrace. (Enter JOANNA and SIR HARRY from back, they are unmasked ; SIR H. carries JOANNA'S domino, they are talking and do not perceive the others ; GOODLAKE starts and points) Ah ! What did I say ?

SIR H. (aside to JOANNA) Too late—better brazen it out.

JOANNA. (coming down) At your service, Mr. Goodlake. (glances at EMBURY) But I fancy we interrupt an investigation. (aside to PEGGY) Remember, guard your tongue unless you'd ruin him.

PEGGY. Knowing my intention to come to the ball, Mrs. Goodlake gave me the benefit of her company, but she is, as you see, under the protection of her cousin, Sir Harry Trimblestone. (they come down)

GOOD. A fig for Sir Harry. 'Twas not to him she wrote the invitation.

PEGGY. Wrote ? Do you mean you have found my letter ? And took the liberty to read it ?

GOOD. 'Tis in my wife's handwriting. (JOANNA and SIR HARRY drop down)

PEGGY. Yes. You should not blame her if she employ it on behalf of one who is less accomplished. (lightly) "Safe in the privacy of a crowd, an ardent welcome is assured you." (laughs) That is, I think, the way it runs, Mr. Goodlake. I vow I cou'd not have made it up myself in a year. (EMBURY removes his eyes from PEGGY for the first time)

GOOD. (humbly crossing to JOANNA) I ask your forgiveness, Joanna. (PEGGY drops down to R. of chair L.)

JOANNA. (tossing her head) Nay, Mr. Goodlake, you'll not wipe out your insults quite so readily. (she turns to EMBURY) I crave your pardon, sir, that I so weakly yielded to this girl's entreaties, but that which masquerades for simplicity is often a tower of strength against those who lay claim to more experience. Indeed, your zeal has been ill rewarded. But 'tis ever thus with those who seek to do an act of charity. (turns) And now, Mr. Goodlake, if you have made sufficient fool of yourself for one evening, you will conduct me home. (SIR HARRY bows to all and goes off L. ; JOANNA curtsies to EMBURY) Good night, Mr. Embury. (she glances at LOVELL and PEGGY) In the matter of your connections, you have my heartfelt sympathy. (she sweeps off at the back ; GOODLAKE follows penitently)

LOVELL. (bowing and going towards cardroom, then turning)

I beg you'll not take her wholly at her word. (*exit upper L. ; there is a long pause ; PEGGY stands in an attitude of deep humiliation, her arms hanging limply at her sides ; EMBURY stands with his back half turned to her, his hands are clenched and he breathes deeply*)

EMBURY. Child, child, how could you ? How could you have the heart to rob me of my faith in you ? I meant so well by you. What have you done for yourself ? God ! What have you done for us both ? Where is your dignity—that priceless jewel of womanhood ? Where are your honour and pride that you can screen a libertine, and pursue one who cares naught for you ? Where is your compassion that you can crush out an honest man's life, and without a thought deride a faithful soul because it fell to loving you ? (*he turns on her suddenly with passion in his voice*) I could almost kill you. Never in my life have I been so bitterly angry—never in my life have I been so infinitely wretched. (*PEGGY's head gradually droops ; a sudden revulsion comes over EMBURY ; he seizes both her hands*) Nay, pretty one, 'tis not quite so bad as I have made out. I'm distraught with thinking. I beg you to have some excuse for me. (*he sinks into chair, still holding her hands, which he presses to his lips, while his tears run down ; PEGGY falls on her knees in front of him, as he releases her hands*)

PEGGY. (*overcome by shame, sorrow, pity, and gratitude*) And do you not hate me now ? (*he looks at her tenderly, and with admiration of her face and form*) Then I'll suffer all the rest. (*she lowers her voice*) You may kill me if you want to. 'Twould not be a great hurt. One must die some time. (*wearily*) And I've had all the fun I want. But if I've to live on, I beg you on my knees to shelter me from wrongdoing—to keep me by your side—to let me be—(*hesitates*) be more to you than I have ever been before. (*she buries her face in her hands. EMBURY rises abruptly*)

EMBURY. No, no, no ! (*he turns and raises her to her feet*) You know not what you are saying, child. (*soothingly*) You are wrought up by excitement, spurred on by your wounded vanity. To-morrow you'll be calmer.

PEGGY. (*shaking her head*) I shall never be so calm again. The storm is all over.

EMBURY. (*gazing at her*) But I am not—not the man you love. Only the man who loves you. There is one whom—

PEGGY. (*shaking her head*) That is all a mistake. I found it out to-night. I can love none but you, and if you will but trust me—(*pause*) Guardian, I know now that it was for yourself you spoke to day. I bring you your answer. (*she extends her hands*) Will you please—please to marry me ? (*he*

stands a moment as if stunned, then in a rapture approaches her)

EMBURY. Sweetheart, you tempt me beyond my strength. *(she lays her head on his shoulder)* Do not cry, pretty one. 'Tis I—I—who have been wrong, wrong, all wrong. In my arrogance I thought to fashion you after my own pattern, and nature has outwitted me. In place of being my servant, she has made me hers. *(he holds her at arm's length and surveys her)* You are her product, not mine, and right well has she acquitted herself! *(admiringly)* Till now I've never seen you in a silken gown. How came you by it?

PEGGY. Mrs. Goodlake lent it me.

EMBURY. *(suddenly)* Mrs. Goodlake! Then it is possible I—tell me, have you ever had it on before?

PEGGY. I wore it this morning to try the fit.

EMBURY. Ah! And my nephew saw you in it? *(she nods)* You left the room abruptly, I think? *(she nods)* The rascal is not so bad then as I have made him out. I accused him of holding a tryst. I mistook you for another.

PEGGY. *(wonderingly)* I then was the cause of your quarrel? But he said—I thought—I understood—the dispute had been concerning the woman whom he—*(she suddenly pauses)*

EMBURY. The woman whom he?

PEGGY. *(after a quiet little hysterical laugh)* I know not what I meant to say. My brain seems all a muddle. 'Tis the unaccustomed noise, and the company. *(pleadingly)* Won't you take me—take me home? I am weary of this place. *(gives another little laugh)* I promise you, dear guardian, I'll betake myself to no more balls. My mischievous days are passed. 'Tis all gone and finished. *(she shivers)*

EMBURY. You are cold, and, like the sorry cavalier I am, you must shiver before I notice it. *(fetches cloak from chair, wraps it round her)*

PEGGY. What have I done?

EMBURY. There—there—and—*(kisses her on forehead)* To-night you are beautiful—beautiful—my darling. Do you understand that I am going to take you at your word—that we are to be married—to be married. *(she nods; he tightens his grasp on her hands)* You'll not change your mind? *(she shakes her head)* You dare not now. Now that you have begun to teach me how to live. One may give life, but one may not take it away. My darling—

PEGGY. My hands! You hurt my hands!

EMBURY. *(kissing them)* Poor little hands. Forgive me! I knew not what I was doing. Faith! I'm scarce conscious who I am. What day is this, Peggy?

PEGGY. The day on which you first proposed to marry me.

EMBURY. Was that to-day? It seems like months ago.

PEGGY. (*turning away*) Indeed it does.

EMBURY. Look at me—look at me, sweetheart. What I'm crying? You are not unhappy?

PEGGY. (*smiling and shaking her head*) No, not unhappy; only tired. So very, very tired.

EMBURY. Come, come. (*she takes his arm and they go up together, she leaning her head upon his shoulder. The music of a country dance now starts, followed by loud laughter and shouting in ballroom, also laughter and noise in cardroom*)

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

SCENE.—*Six weeks later. The Garden of the South Cottage at Hampstead; the house, of dull red brick, is at upper L.; the porch, which stands out in distinct view of the audience, is covered with vines and creepers; there are two steps to porch; at back of house are chestnut and other trees in bloom; facing the audience near C. at back is narrow pathway or avenue, which is arched by a trellis work; this is covered with golden laburnum, the long blossoms hanging fringe-like through the spaces; the pathway extends as far back as the stage will permit; it then turns to the right, and out of sight. Just before the bend is reached, there is a small wicket gate, which is open; at R. there are lilac bushes in bloom, and standing slightly out is a wide rustic summer house, or arbour; this is covered with purple wisteria; in front of arbour, standing out, is a rustic bench; there is a flower bed down L. attached to wall of house; there is an exit upper L. above house, and another between the bushes at upper R., also an exit at lower L.*

MRS. DEBORAH is discovered standing near the house; she is dressed much as in Act II.; she is shading her eyes with her hand, and looking off upper R.

MRS. D. (*impatiently*) Will the good-for-nothing never come with that last load? Ah, there he is. (*loudly*) Peter, Peter, what's to do?

PETER. (*off*) I be coming, Mrs. Deborah.

MRS. D. And so be Christmas. Be careful of that hedge, you clumsy put! (*PETER appears, a wooden box on his shoulders*) And now think you I've nothing better to do than wait about on your pleasure? I'd 'a'gone to our house and back a dozen times.

PETER. (*comes down R.C.*) Like as not, Mrs. Deborah, but then you are a vastly ingenious woman. So ingenious that Mr. Embury wouldn't think of stopping you on the way and sending you off to the barracks with a message.

MRS. D. A message! Would it be to Captain Lovell?

PETER. (*doggedly*) Maybe it would. (*she turns to him*) Maybe it wouldn't.

MRS. D. It seems a monstrous pity he should be wanting to hurry off to foreign parts now that he and Mr. Embury have made up their differences. It is likely that the message had some bearing on this caprice of his.

PETER (*obstinately*) Aye, 'tis likely, but then again, who knows? It might have been about the weather—or the crops.

MRS. D. (*irritably*) Mercy! I can't think what possesses me to stand here wasting my time with a lazy, idle—(*goes towards house*)

PETER. Mrs. Deborah, I've got something for your private ear.

MRS. D. (*turning with marked curiosity*) Yes! (*he beckons and she goes to him*)

PETER. (*lowering his voice*) This box is uncommon heavy. (*puts it down and sits on it*)

MRS. D. Drat your impudence! Take it inside, so I can lay the linen it contains beside the rest. I warrant Miss Peggy will open her eyes when she finds each piece placed ready for use, and everything new from garret to cellar. Which makes one marvel what Mr. Embury can be intending to do with the old place, for not an article has been moved or disturbed. Think you he means to sell it?

PETER. (*imperturbably*) Well, he's said nothing about raffling it.

MRS. D. And mark you, while I'm to be shifted here, you're to remain there.

PETER. He don't want me to get corrupted by evil companions.

MRS. D. (*impatently*) I warrant you know considerably more than you let out.

PETER. Which makes us uncommon even; for you, Mrs. Deborah, are wont to let out considerably more than you know.

MRS. D. (*emphatically*) I know this much. No man in his senses wants to keep two houses going at one time.

PETER. No *single* man, perhaps, but two houses are none too many for a married man; it allows of one for himself and one for his wife. And 'tis by such methods that conubial happiness is guaranteed.

MRS. D. And pray what can you know of the married state?

PETER. I know enough to have escaped it, Mrs. D., and that's all the knowledge a man requires. (*lifts box*)

GOOD. (*loudly outside*) Hillo! Somebody! How the devil does one come at the house?

MRS. D. It is Mr. Goodlake. Hurry in with that box, Peter. (*PETER goes off round by the upper side of the house*)

Enter GOODLAKE at upper R.

GOOD. Gad! I've heard that Paradise was a ticklish hard place for a man who sought a short cut, but this beats all

warning. I was told I should find our captive swain on the enchanted ground. Where is he?

MRS. D. Mr. Embury has just stepped into yonder meadow path—(*points off c.*) to have a word with the Parson.

GOOD. (*laughing*) Egad! I've misgivings he's taken fright at the last minute, and is bribing the Parson to cancel to-morrow's job. (*comes down to bench, R.C.*)

MRS. D. Nay, the wedding will come off safe enough. Young Mistress Embury that is to be comes to-day to inspect her new home for the first time. I take it you and your lady will be at the church, Mr. Goodlake.

GOOD. (*shaking his head*) There is something happened to prevent it. 'Tis on this account I'd see Mark Embury. (*Enter EMBURY down path c.*) And here he comes as solemn as two funerals, I'll be sworn. (*EMBURY carries a large bunch of wild flowers; he comes c.*)

EMBURY. (*giving flowers to MRS. DEBORAH*) Be good enough to place these in the white bed-chamber, Mrs. Deborah. (*she takes the flowers and exits into the house; turns to GOODLAKE*) And how does friend Roger?

GOOD. Lord, I hope better than *you*, if your countenance tells any tale. Is it the natural fear of the leap, man, or what plagues you? (*sits on bench*)

EMBURY. (*smiling*) Nothing, Roger—nothing, as I live. I swear I'm at peace with all mankind, which means I'm uncommonly satisfied with myself. And now, I take it, you've come for a peep at the place?

GOOD. No. My time is all too short. I've told you of the trip to France, which for the sake of Joanna's health I've long been contemplating. Well, it seems there's been some mistake in the date set to meet our friends at Dover, and instead of leaving two days hence we have to start to-day.

EMBURY. My best wishes go with you.

GOOD. But Damme! I shan't be here to see you take the plunge.

EMBURY. (*smiling*) Then you're spared the chance of seeing me stick in the mud.

GOOD. I'll admit that in one particular it is a relief, for when a man has made a confounded fool of himself, he doesn't relish meeting the witness of his folly.

EMBURY. You allude to Captain Lovell Your mind could have rested easy. You would not have met Captain Lovell at my wedding.

GOOD. But I thought the family rupture had been mended.

EMBURY. Just so. But that does not lessen his anxiety to be away from here. He's for making his fortune in the Colonies, and this morning I had word of his intention to start at once.

Good. (*rising*) A rolling stone gathers scant moss, and he's better off at home.

EMBURY. I have hopes to persuade him to that effect, and have sent for him, so that I may administer a final argument.

Good. Then I'll be going. (*goes up*) Embury—(*offers his hand*) this saying good-bye is a most damnable thing. Six months is a long time when you're looking forward, and Lord knows what marriage will have twisted you into by the time I return.

EMBURY. (*taking his hand*) I promise you to remain unchanged, old friend, unchanged in every particular. Good-bye, and God speed! Stay, I'll see you to the lane. (*they exeunt together upper R.*)

After slight pause enter PEGGY down centre path; she is dressed in a lilac gown, simply made, but not so severely plain as her former gowns; she has a little black silk scarf cape on; her hair is tied at the nape of her neck and she wears an old-fashioned bonnet. Her appearance is altogether quaint and odd, and suggests the idea that she has been trying to make herself look older than she is. She carries the large green book under her arm; she looks about the garden, approaches the house, than halts and listens. Next she goes to the rustic bench and sits, takes off the black scarf and places it on back of bench, opens the book and slowly takes out the pressed shamrocks; she gathers them all in one hand, rises and goes to the flower bed, where she takes a stick and digs a small hole.

PEGGY. Yes, I'll dig a hole and bury them.

Mrs. D. (*heard off*) Make haste, make haste!

PEGGY jumps up and returns with her book to the bench. After replacing the shamrocks in book, she hides it behind her on the bench. Enter Mrs. DEBORAH from house. She has her bonnet on and carries a small hand-basket.

Mrs. D. So you've got here, and all by yourself. Oh, dearie! It is a sweet place, and I pray you'll be thrice happy in it. (*embraces her affectionately*) I vow I have to make the most of you to-day, for it is not with Mistress Embury that I shall dare to take such liberties. (*begins to cry*) It is

like losing you altogether. (*embraces her again impulsively ; PEGGY bursts into tears and they weep together*) There, there, my pretty. Think of your sweet white gown. It will be a proud and happy day for you. (*they both sit down*)

PEGGY. (*half sobbing*) It will be a de-delightful oc-casion.

MRS. D. (*sobbing*) In truth it will.

PEGGY. (*sobbing*) And I ought to be the happiest girl in the world. (*suddenly checking her tears*) Moreover, I am the happiest girl in the world. And you mustn't presume to think otherwise.

MRS. D. No, dearie, no.

PEGGY. (*stamping her foot*) Then stop crying. You ought to be ashamed to behave like this, the day before my wedding. I don't see what anyone has to cry about, unless it is that they are jealous of my good fortune. (*suddenly*) That is it, you bad old woman. You are jealous, and when I am married I shall treat you with—with— (*tosses her head*) great dignity, great dignity. (*crosses down R.C.*)

MRS. D. (*drying her eyes*) It bids fair to be an uncommon quiet wedding.

PEGGY. And who, pray, wants to have a lot of silly gaping guests?

MRS. D. Still, when one has such a fine house, with chairs and tables of real mahogany, and, look you, there are six dozen of everything. (*goes close to her*)

PEGGY. (*startled*) Not six dozen tables?

MRS. D. (*shaking her head*) I was thinking of the linen. What is more, there is—you'd never divine what. And you mustn't know, because I'm pledged not to tell you, but—there's a harpsichord.

PEGGY. (*with pleased surprise*) A harpsichord! I had thought Mr. Embury disliked the sound of music. 'Tis a strange purchase for an old-fashioned elderly couple. (*suddenly turning*) Think you I begin to look elderly, Mrs. Deborah? (*proudly*) I had this bonnet designed to please my guardian, and to lend me age and stateliness. 'Tis said that women grow old sooner than men, so I may soon catch up to him.

MRS. D. Nay, I wouldn't be impatient on the age question. 'Twill come soon enough.

PEGGY. (*pettishly*) But it won't come soon enough. I want it to come to-morrow, for to-morrow I shall be—somebody's aunt. (*pauses, then turns suddenly*) Do you know—have you heard he goes away to-day? (*leans her head on MRS. D.'s shoulder*)

MRS. D. Poor Captain Lovell! (*shakes her head and puts her handkerchief to her eyes*)

PEGGY. (*hiding her own tears*) I declare you are crying

again. How dare you be so weak and silly? As if he could stay idling here and spoil all his future chances. (*sobs*) In my regret there is some excuse, for to me he is a relative, or he will be to-morrow, and it is quite proper to grieve about a relative.

EMBURY. (*heard outside*) Yes, yes, trim the hedge down.

MRS. D. (*listening*) 'Sh!

Enter EMBURY from R.

EMBURY. (*coming down*) And I was not here to greet you after all. Let me make amends. (*extends his hands*) Welcome, child, welcome to your new home. (*she timidly places her hands in his*)

MRS. D. Everything is in readiness, sir. Would you like that I should show Miss Peggy through the house before I go?

EMBURY. No, I thank you.

MRS. D. Then I'd best deliver up the keys. (*produces from her basket a bunch of keys hung on a white ribbon*) I've taken the liberty to string them on a white ribbon, and now I'll be getting back. There's much to do. (*curtseys and goes off R.*)

PEGGY. Am I not then to go through the—through our house to-day?

EMBURY. (*nervously*) Yes, yes, child. But I have a fancy for you to see it first, accompanied by no one but—but your future husband.

PEGGY. Then shall we go now?

EMBURY. (*absent-mindedly*) Nay, not now. (*looks up*) There is plenty of time, dear one. (*cheerily*) And you haven't seen half the garden yet. I hope you like it Peggy.

PEGGY. Indeed, I like it very much, guardian. (*he looks at her with a quiet sadness*) I ask your pardon. I remembered you desired me to call you by your first name, and try as I may, I have not yet been able to accomplish it. But I will try again; believe me, I will.

EMBURY. Nay, child, I do not wish you to do anything that costs an effort. And I am not sure but the word "guardian" has a gentle and more appropriate sound.

PEGGY. (*at extreme R. of bench*) 'Tis difficult to break one's habit, is it not?

EMBURY. Most difficult, and many things that seem easy at the start grow perplexing as one advances. Do you remember last night I spoke of a little talk we were to have? (*she nods; he sits beside her on bench*) By sleeping on the subject, I thought to tackle it more readily, but I could not sleep. And at sunrise I arose and went out in the meadows, and what, think you, was the subject of my meditation?

Come here, child. (*she sits nearer to him*) Peggy, I have been wondering if, in planning out your future, I have done always what was right. I mean for you. Right for your happiness.

PEGGY. You have always acted for my happiness, dear guardian.

EMBURY. (*shaking his head*) That is what I have told myself. (*smiles sadly*) But I've lately been troubled with doubts as to my own veracity.

PEGGY. But all that has been pleasant in my life I owe to you.

EMBURY. (*taking her hand*) Nay, dear heart, you owe me nothing. The happiness you have already bestowed on me is a dower that will last me all my life. (*Peggy cries a little*) And remember this—always remember this. No relation that you might bear to me, could enhance the tenderness in which I already hold you. (*rises*) And now we'll say no more about these things, except that what must, will be, and what is, is right.

PEGGY. Then what you have planned for me, that must be right also. Do you fear that as a wife I shall disappoint you? (*rises*)

EMBURY. No. As a wife you will not disappoint me. And what I have planned is right, quite right. (*changes his tone*) But tell me of your new gown and bonnets—and furbelows. Have they all been fashioned to your liking? (*sits again*)

PEGGY. Yes, and to yours, I hope.

EMBURY. I warrant Mrs. Deborah has not forgot the rice and the old shoes. Such sacred functions will scarce brook neglect.

PEGGY. She fears only an insufficient audience.

EMBURY. 'Tis true our supply of guests is dwindling down. (*pauses*) Do you know that George Lovell proposes to leave us?

PEGGY. (*quietly*) Yes.

EMBURY. And that he proposes to go at once—to-day?

PEGGY. Yes.

EMBURY. It is my wish that he should stay.

PEGGY. Stay for—for our wedding.

EMBURY. Yes. For our—stay for the wedding.

PEGGY. Have you asked him to remain?

EMBURY. No—I want you to ask him.

PEGGY. I? (*she is much confused*).

EMBURY. Have you the courage to persuade him for his good, when the advice may cause you a little temporary pain?

PEGGY. (*quietly*) Yes.

EMBURY. Then you shall ask him to give up his roving design. I would have him settle down at home. (*pauses*) I would have him—marry.

PEGGY. (*quickly, off her guard*) Marry! (*half rises*)

EMBURY. (*gently preventing her*) I have told you it is for his own good. Will you do it?

PEGGY. Think you my words 'will carry so much weight?

EMBURY. If you speak them with conviction. (*takes a letter from his pocket*. You may give him this. It will confirm what you may say. (*rises*) He'll likely be here anon. In the meantime we'll explore the garden. 'Tis a rare old garden. (*leads her to R.*) But I am forgetting your keys. (*he hangs ribbon on her arm*) You'll need them by-and-bye. They will open all the doors, and I promise you there is not a blue chamber in all the castle. Come, pretty one, let us to the garden. (*he takes her hand and they go off R.*; presently LOVELL enters down the centre path; he looks about the garden; PETER enters from the upper side of the house)

LOVELL. So that is the new house, eh? Is my uncle within?

PETER. (*coming down a little*) No, Captain, he'll be somewhere about the grounds, though.

LOVELL. I think his message bade me wait in the garden.

PETER. Yes, Captain. In the garden, near the arbour. This is the garden, (*points*) that be the arbour, and there be you.

LOVELL. If you see my uncle, say that I am come.

PETER. Yes, Captain. (*goes off upper R.*)

LOVELL walks impatiently to and fro; presently he espies the black wrap, he looks at it, then about the garden eagerly; then he sees the green book on bench, he takes it up, turns the leaves and finds the withered shamrocks, he gives a look of pleased surprise, he half turns so that his back is towards R. Enter PEGGY; she still has the keys on her arm, she gets nearly to the middle of the stage before she sees LOVELL, then she stops timidly, and turns as if to go back; he turns and closes the book.

LOVELL. I did not know that you—that I should meet you here.

PEGGY. (*with embarrassment*) No, I—I went to see the garden, but I remembered that I had left my book, and hurried back. (*holds out her hand*) I want my book.

LOVELL. (*indicating the book he holds*) This ?

PEGGY. Yes.

LOVELL. (*with a slight frown and a constraint in his voice*) You did keep the shamrocks.

PEGGY. Yes, but I am not going to keep them after to-day.

LOVELL. Then I may have them back ?

PEGGY. No. It was my intention to bury them, but in all the way along I found no likely spot. (*extends her hand again for the book*)

LOVELL. (*giving it, bitterly*) Such weeds sometimes have a knack of taking root, and springing up afresh.

PEGGY. Not when they are quite dead. (*opens book*) See, there's severed leaves and broken stems.

LOVELL. (*moving slightly away*) I've a notion my uncle must have sent for me to admire the outside of his dwelling, since he did not ask me in. Perhaps you will repair his omission.

PEGGY. (*shaking her head*) I mustn't. I do not like to. I've not been in myself as yet. Mr. Embury has a fancy regarding my first inspection. (*looks back*) And he's not here. But I know why he sent for you. (*timidly*) He wishes you to change your mind about leaving England.

LOVELL. He's intimated as much already, and already I've declined.

PEGGY. But he thought were I to ask you—

LOVELL. Ask me what ?

PEGGY. (*nervously*) To stay at home—to settle down somewhere near—near—here.

LOVELL. (*frowning*) And you—you would propose that ? (*advances to her*)

PEGGY. He assured me 'twould be for your good, and he always speaks the truth.

LOVELL. My good, forsooth. (*goes up c. and laughs harshly*) It seems Mr. Embury has a passion for shaping other people's destinies. Is there any more to his message ? (*turns*)

PEGGY. Yes. (*tremulously and lowering her eyes*) He would have you—have you marry. (*sits on bench*)

LOVELL. (*startled*) Upon my life ! (*stands off and looks at her*) And I once thought you had a heart.

PEGGY. (*half crying*) Can't you see it is my task—doing what I've promised ?

LOVELL. And so you would have me marry ? (*she nods slowly*) You urge me to it from a sense of duty. Ha—ha—ha ! 'Tis a droll spectacle. You, my mentor and adviser.

PEGGY. (*spiritedly*) Indeed, I see nothing odd in that. You forget I am your aunt—or I shall be by to-morrow. (*rises*)

LOVELL. (*backs to L.C., sarcastically*) Ten thousand pardons. I had forgotten the respect due to your venerable position.

PEGGY. 'Tis not kind in you to ridicule me.

LOVELL. (*angrily*) And pray, have you shown any regard for my sensibilities? But continue, I beg. Your errand isn't finished.

PEGGY. I've nothing more to say.

LOVELL. And am I not to learn the description or name of the lady my uncle has so generously provided for me.

PEGGY. He did not tell me. But he gave me a letter. You may learn in that. (*produces EMBURY's letter from her pocket*)

LOVELL. (*wavering it aside*) Read it, I pray you. (*she shakes her head; he takes it, breaks the seal, spreads it open, then hands it back*) As my aunt it is one of your duties. (*she takes it, glances timidly at the page, reads the first few lines, then suddenly gives a little hysterical scream, drops the letter, looks round wildly, then runs off upper R.; LOVELL turns in astonishment, then picks up letter; reading*) "The affection that my dear girl entertains for you has long been known to me, but it is only of late since I have watched you in her company, that I have known this attachment was mutual. In the endeavour to secure my own happiness, I have tried to put my discovery behind me, but I can no longer cheat myself—nor you. Take with my dear one the little home she brings you, and if you are half as happy dwelling in it as I have been in planning it, then my life's experiment can not be counted a failure. Let no thought of me cloud your happiness. I am neither a martyr nor a hero. Bachelorhood has many charms to one of my temperament, and old habits are hard to break." (*LOVELL looks dazed, then turns excitedly*) Where is she? (*he goes up to R., hurries off and returns immediately, leading PEGGY; she has been crying*) You should not run away from me, because you are mine now—all mine. He has given you to me—to keep for ever. He means it. You must read it all by-and-bye, and then you'll say with me, God bless him! Come, look me in the eyes, and say you love me. Remember, 'tis for my good.

PEGGY. (*looking up timidly*) Need I say it? Saying is so hard, but— (*she pauses, and then gently puts her arm round his neck; he bends to kiss her; she draws back timidly*) Would you like me to show you the house?

LOVELL. May you?

PEGGY. Yes, I may now. See, here are the keys. I'm told the furniture is beautiful, and there's a— (*with a*

pleased smile and lowered voice) There is a harpsichord. (*he takes her hand, and together they enter the house*)

Enter EMBURY from R. ; he walks slowly, with hands linked behind him ; as he reaches the house the harpsichord is heard playing the old melody, " My love is like a red, red rose " ; he halts a moment and then listens, while the two voices take up the refrain and finish the verse to the harpsichord accompaniment ; then he proceeds on his way, and goes slowly up the centre path ; when he comes to the little wicket gate, he passes it and closes it behind him, turns and facing the audience, he fastens the latch, gives one more glance at the cottage, then continues along the path, and out of sight ; the singing is till heard within as the curtain falls.

END OF PLAY.



13p

1/3p